**Transformative Teaching: An Observation in a Second Grade Classroom**

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Teaching is an art form. It takes time to develop the skills to take scripted state standards and board-approved curriculum and transform it into an engaging and meaningful lesson for all learners. Elementary teachers learn to take a prescriptive algorithm of lesson planning and create a learning experience that ignites minds to think about the world differently, for all students, every day.

The Winona State University-Rochester Education Department (WSU-RED) has a partnership with Rochester Public Schools that spans over three decades. This partnership created the Graduate Induction Program (GIP); a master’s degree program in which licensed first-year teachers complete their course work over the span of four semesters while gaining first-hand experience as a teacher in their own classroom. Rochester Public Schools offers twelve to sixteen of their elementary teaching vacancies to these GIP students each year. Students work with WSU-RED faculty in the evenings to gain insight on theoretical application to research-based instructional strategies. During the day, Rochester Public Schools offers internal coaching support at the building level and at the district level to assist the GIP students’ implementation of these strategies.

The purpose of this study is to explore the instructional philosophy of one GIP student. Through narrative research methodology, I interviewed and observed Meagan Kelly in the early weeks of February 2022. Narrative research focuses on the “the individual experiences and may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). Meagan is currently enrolled in her third semester of the GIP and teaches 2nd grade at Harriet Bishop Elementary School in the Rochester Public School District. I first met Meagan during her first semester in the GIP; Summer 2021. Meagan was enrolled in REDG 600: Improving Curriculum and Instruction, which I was the instructor, and EDFD 608: Diverse Learners, which I co-facilitated with another WSU-RED faculty member. The goals of REDG 600 and EDFD 608 was for students to learn advanced methods and instructional strategies to create a mini thematic unit, multi-session, hands-on STEM class for the Rochester Public School District’s summer school program. During these courses, Meagan created mini thematic units on earth’s landforms, Lego Mindstorms, and parachutes.

**Interview**

Meagan Kelly met with me on February 2, 2022, via Zoom. Since Meagan and I had worked together previously, the virtual setting for the interview was comfortable and pleasant. I followed the Interview Protocol in Appendix A to guide the discussion. The interview protocol has nine questions divided into two categories: teaching philosophy and teaching pedagogy. The goal of the interview protocol was to gain insight into Meagan’s guiding beliefs as a teacher and how she approaches instruction in her classroom.

From the interview, several themes emerged that aligned with the Holistic learning theory including the importance of relationships, the development of the whole person, and connecting learning to real-world experiences (Johnson, 2019). Although some components of the Constructivist learning theory were evident, evidence from the interview points to Meagan’s philosophy of learning aligns with a Holistic perspective. Meagan believes strongly on the importance of developing meaningful relationships with her students and among her students. Johnson (2019) describes the emotional dimension of Holistic learning theory as the ability to be aware and manage one’s emotions, be empathetic, and the ability to manage interpersonal relationships with peers. This is emphasized throughout Meagan’s interview found in the Coded Interview Field Notes in Appendix B. Meagan believed that for true community to exist in the classroom, students need authentic relationships with their peers and with their teachers. Meagan also believed in the importance of building social comprehension with her students. She does this by providing multiple opportunities for her students to interact with each other during instructional times of the day. Students can practice using academic vocabulary in meaningful ways, as well as refine their interpersonal social skills. Johnson (2019) lists the following as typical social skills: “interaction skills, conversation and communication skills, skills related to building and maintaining friendships, consideration skills, empathy skills, and conflict resolution skills” (p. 124). During the lesson, Meagan planned to build an interactive lesson that allows students to share out with partners and with the whole group. These opportunities for students to work with partners allow students to help each other on academic tasks while following the gradual release of responsibility. These group work times allow students to communicate ideas, practice active listening, consider other perspectives, and allow conflict resolution to occur.

**Observation**

Meagan Kelly’s classroom is an active learning environment. As I walked into the classroom, the natural light flooded the room that gave it a cheerful tone. Students were sitting on the floor for their Morning Meeting watching a video about what confidence means and looks like. Students were behaviorally engaged; consistent focus on the video and attending to the video’s message. The overall mood of the students was pleasant at that time.

When Ms. Kelly transitioned to the reading lesson, student engagement decreased as students lost focus on the learning and shifted to socializing with peers. This level of engagement lasted throughout the lesson regardless of Ms. Kelly’s attempts to gain their attention and give strategies to self-regulate. A major factor that caused the inattentiveness was consistent interruptions by students who received additional support. Student behaviors like roaming and leaving the room, caused Ms. Kelly to attend to their individual needs and ensure their personal safety by contacting student support specialists to assist. At other times, staff were present in the room to observe students that were being evaluated for special education services; these students were not eligible for additional services, so Ms. Kelly needed to provide additional supports throughout the lesson to help make them successful. During a seven-minute period of the lesson, I conducted a time-on-task of the class to measure academic engagement; 66% of the students were attending to the lesson. Aligned with her belief that all children are unique and the importance of relationships, Ms. Kelly kept calm throughout the lesson. She approached students quietly and individually about their behaviors and shared her expectations for them at that time.

The reading lesson was focused on reading and responding to questions from an article about the history of ice-skating. The lesson started with a worksheet being passed out to pairs of students. When one paper is provided to two students, it provides a cooperative learning experience because the students are interdependent on each other to complete the task. This is a common strategy in cooperative learning. Ms. Kelly introduced the topic by asking a question so she could assess students’ prior knowledge of ice-skating, “How many of you have been ice-skating before?” Then students were asked to share their experiences with their partners. Ms. Kelly opened the online magazine article about ice-skating. She explained that she would let the program read the article to the students aloud. Per the worksheet directions, Ms. Kelly stopped the read aloud periodically to answer questions. Ms. Kelly drew the students’ attention to the worksheet that had three questions listed with stop signs next to them. She explained that the stop signed indicated when needed to stop reading and answer the questions. As the class read and paused, students worked in pairs to respond to the questions. Ms. Kelly would ask pairs to volunteer and share their responses with the whole class. The model of Think-Pair-Share is another cooperative learning strategy that is beneficial for all learners. To wrap up the lesson, Ms. Kelly played an integrated video that corresponded to the article. Prior to watching the video, students make connects between the text and the world by talking about the Winter Olympics occurring right now. The video illustrated figure skating, hockey, and speed skating.

The lesson itself was structured in a way that would lead to student learning. Considering Danielson’s (2007) framework for teaching, I observed several hallmarks of a well-planned lesson. Ms. Kelly had reading learning targets posted for students to read and review. The text used for the lesson was at the students’ grade level as well as it was displayed for all students to access together. The text was online and interactive; when played, each word was highlighted as it was read aloud to assist students tracking when reading as well as had videos to build background knowledge. Ms. Kelly provided multiple opportunities for students to have meaningful interactions with a peer about the content. Finally, the execution of Ms. Kelly’s instruction focused on guiding students to read and respond to the text with her assistance throughout the lesson. In Vygotsky’s gradual release of responsibility, this phase is considered, “we do” as the teacher guides students through the learning process. Students were asked to think at all levels of cognition. Ms. Kelly scaffolded her questioning to start with low-level questions for students to begin thinking and then would move to higher-level questions for deeper thought. My overall evaluation of the lesson structure was adequate. It was structured in a manner to maintain academic engagement and deeper cognition on the topic with meaningful interactions throughout.

During the observation, I observed a Ms. Kelly informally assess her students’ prior knowledge of ice-skating. Through the assessment, I was able to determine that many students had some prior knowledge of what ice-skating was, but most had not experienced it themselves. Throughout the lesson, Ms. Kelly assessed for learning as roamed and assisted groups assessing their progress toward answering the questions and allowed groups to share out their answers with the whole group. The worksheets were not collected by Ms. Kelly at the end so no summative assessment of the learning was collected from this lesson.

**Dominant Instructional Model**

Based on the observation, the dominant instructional model was cooperative learning aligned with the theory of Holistic Learning. Johnson (2019) described cooperative learning as a teaching and learning model in which students work in small groups to reach a shared goal. Cooperative learning builds interdependence within a group where students trust each other to work toward a common goal knowing that working together will result in learning more. Throughout Ms. Kelly’s lesson, themes of cooperative learning were present. The objective of the lesson was to answer questions about the article in which she structured to be completed in pairs. She passed out one worksheet for each pair, had both partners write their names on the top, and all directions focused on students communicating their ideas orally before writing their shared answer on paper. The cooperative learning model aligns with Ms. Kelly’s philosophy of teaching which focuses on building relationships with and among her students.

**Conclusion**

Throughout educational settings from preschool to higher education, teachers are working to transform the learning experiences for their students. Like bakers in a kitchen, teachers have recipes to follow to ensure all the ingredients of an effective lesson are present. Like ingredients in a recipe, teachers have state standards, learning objectives, materials, accommodations, and curriculum. The beautiful part of teaching occurs when the teacher adds their own spice, flare, and twist to the teaching recipe. Transformative teaching lifts students’ engagement, students’ emotions, and active participation in the learning process to the highest level in the learning process. Through this, students are being transformed to being thinkers and scholars but also advocates and citizens.

**References**

Creswell, J. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

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Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching* (2nd ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Johnson, A. P. (2019). *Essential learning theories: Application to authentic teaching situations*. Rowman & Littlefield.

**Appendix A**

*Interview Protocol*

|  |
| --- |
| Time: |
| Date: Interview: x ; Observation: February 8th or 11th |
| Place: |
| Interviewer: David Wolff |
| Interviewee and position: |
| Introduce yourself and the purpose of this interview.  “For my ED.D. course *Instructional Models for Learners and Leaders*, I am learning more about teacher’s philosophy and pedagogy and how it translates into their classroom instruction.” |
| Teaching Philosophy |
| 1. What are your core beliefs about teaching? |
| 1. What are your core beliefs about learning? |
| 1. What is your motivation for being a teacher? |
| 1. What separates you apart from other teacher in your building? |
| 1. What unique skill set or perspective do you bring to the classroom? |
| Teaching Pedagogy |
| 1. What are your goals for student learning for this lesson? |
| 1. How does this lesson build on what your students have already learned? How does it related to what they will learn in the future? |
| 1. What teaching methods will you use for this lesson? |
| 1. How will you group students for instruction? |
| Thank the teacher for their time and thoughtful answers.  “Thank you very much for taking time to meet with me today. Your insights and knowledge of your teaching philosophy will help me tremendously in my field research. I look forward to sharing my findings with you soon. Again, thank you very much.” |

**Appendix B**

**Table 2**

*Coded Interview Field Notes*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Time: 7:00pm |  |
| Date: Interview: 2/2/22; Observation: 2/8/22 at 10:00am |  |
| Place: Zoom |  |
| Interviewer: David Wolff |  |
| Interviewee and position: Meagan Kelly, GIP Student, 2nd Grade Teacher, Rochester Public School District |  |
| Introduce yourself and the purpose of this interview.  “For my ED.D. course *Instructional Models for Learners and Leaders*, I am learning more about teacher’s philosophy and pedagogy and how it translates into their classroom instruction.” |  |
| **Response to Question** | **Coding** |
| Teaching Philosophy |  |
| 1. What are your core beliefs about teaching?   *I think teaching is an amazing job. It has many positive impacts on kids.*  *Teaching is about molding children; teaching them life skills they need. Education is key to moving on in life to high school and the workforce.*  *As teacher we mold students as a person and give them their education as well.*  *Relationships are important; I want to be the person they need for extra support.* | Life Skills – Constructivist & Holistic  Relationships – Holistic |
| 1. What are your core beliefs about learning?   *Everyone learns differently. Everyone is a special and unique individual.*  *Teachers need to be mindful of this and embrace this by brining opportunities to the classroom.*  *People need different things to learn.* | Learning isn’t standardized – Constructivist |
| 1. What is your motivation for being a teacher?   *Growing up, my mom was a teacher and I saw my own teachers; these examples inspired me to be a teacher. I started working with students early and during my coursework it deepened my passion.*  *Teaching is complex because you are influencing kids’ lives and teaching life skills.*  3a. Follow up: What is most rewarding about teaching?  *The relationships with students. Students learn from me and from their peers.*  *I see the relationships build when we go through tough times together and laugh together.*  *It is important to step back and see the relationships with your kids.* | Life Skills – Constructivist & Holistic  Relationships – Holistic |
| 1. What separates you apart from other teacher in your building?   *Placing relationships at a high value.*  *I give students opportunities to talk; the freedom to talk with each other and learn from each other.*  *I am honest with my students. We talk about our feelings, and I validate their feelings to show that I care.*  *The connections with each other are important*. | Relationships – Holistic  Social Interactions – Constructivist & Holistic  Emotional Intelligence – Holistic |
| 1. What unique skill set or perspective do you bring to the classroom?   *I bring a calm demeanor and presence to the classroom; this makes a big difference in the classroom because it brings a sense of calm to the kids.*  *Kids feel comfortable, calm, seen, and important.* | Emotional Intelligence – Holistic |
| Teaching Pedagogy |  |
| 1. What are your goals for student learning for this lesson?   *Recently our team has been looking at the second-grade report card; wondering, what are the skills the students still need? What are the skills we need to focus on?*  *I like interactive lessons that provided opportunities to talk with partners; I try to be mindful of talking opportunities throughout the lesson.*  *I like to keep kids moving; incorporate movement in the lesson.*  *Through these, student should be able to accomplish the learning target. I ask the students to rate their understanding if they met the learning target or not.* | Building on prior knowledge – Constructivist  Social Interactions – Constructivist & Holistic  Metacognition – Constructivist |
| 1. How does this lesson build on what your students have already learned? How does it related to what they will learn in the future?   *I focus on practicing and repeating skills so that I can go deeper as we move forward in the year. For example, rather than one-word answers, students can be expected to answer in complete sentences.*  *Since students just returned to in-person instruction from Distance Learning, we have to adjust how to progress based on what students may have missed due to D.L.*  *To support this, I use sentence frames and anchor charts to guide students to independence.* | Distributed Practice – Constructivist  Gradual Release of Responsibility – Constructivist |
| 1. What teaching methods will you use for this lesson?   *I try to keep the reading lesson interactive.*  *We will start with a whole group read aloud and then move to a connected activity. The activities vary each day to practice a new skill and revisit that skill later.*  *Students will work with partners throughout the lesson.* | Social Interactions – Constructivist & Holistic  Distributed Practice – Constructivist |
| 1. How will you group students for instruction?   *Covid protocols has really impacted how we group students so we can track close contacts.*  *I have students working with their team at their tables a lot to give students opportunities to work with everyone regardless of their skill level.*  *Students help each other out and model how to be a good partner.* | Social Interactions – Constructivist & Holistic |
| Thank the teacher for their time and thoughtful answers.  “Thank you very much for taking time to meet with me today. Your insights and knowledge of your teaching philosophy will help me tremendously in my field research. I look forward to sharing my findings with you soon. Again, thank you very much.” |  |

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