Mentoring Project

This past semester I have had the chance to mentor in two wonderful elementary schools. I chose to perform my mentoring project in different environments so that I could see how different teachers interacted with students, and how students at different grade levels interacted not only with each other, but also with adults inside and outside of the classroom. Although I only spent one day with the second grade class, I noticed a lot of differences between teaching an after school program and spend in the day with twenty-six five-year-olds.

The second that I visited was very inviting. On October 18, 2001 I was introduced to a very pleasant principle, Mr. Smith*. After introducing himself, he introduced me to the school counselor. In her office, we discussed confidentiality issues that may arise in the classroom. She explained that I was bound, just as any other school staff, to be completely confidential on any matter concerning Melview* Elementary School and its students and staff. I then completed a form that would allow my background check to be sent to the school. When Mr. Smith gave me a tour of the school, I was completely impressed. Along the walls hung student artwork that ranged from paper pumpkins to self-collages. As was walked towards Mr. Thompson’s room, students rushed by with a friendly hello on their way to their after school destination.

The next week I showed up for my afternoon session with second grade students. Mr. Thompson asked me if I felt comfortable working with one small group of students while he worked with the other. While he concentrated on reading with his group, I focused more on sounds and spelling with my group. We played a game that dealt with pictures and letters. I would hold up a picture, for example a frog, and the student would have to pick from the ten or eleven letters that I laid in front of them. When the student struggled, I would work with them on the sounds in the word. With the picture of the frog, we would sound out each individual letter and review the different letter that could make a certain sound.

The first group that I worked with was much more challenging then the second group. Before we began, Mr. Thompson explained to me that the students in the first group needed more
help with reading than the second group of students. I enjoyed working with all of the students, even though I had to reach and try harder with the first group. Before I knew it, the hour was up, the students were no longer asking repeatedly to go to the bathroom, and they quickly lined up to go downstairs. Afterwards, Mr. Thompson gave me a book that explained how to teach sounds to students when they are trying to learn how to read. Although I was unable to return to the class because of time conflicts, I read the book and gained a lot of information that will help me when I have my own class in the future.

Before ever going to Melview Elementary School, I began my mentoring at a private school in Northern Kentucky. I chose that school because I was able to work with a kindergarten class. When I met with Ms. Hyde, she gave me an invitation to join her class anytime that I wanted or needed to. On the first day, I arrived at the beginning of a birthday party. There were twenty-five kindergartners sitting readily in their seats waiting for a cookie. She introduced me to her class and for the rest of the day I heard “Ms. Jessica” coming from little voices around the room. I was very surprised with how “good” the children behaved. I handed out paper towels to each of the students while Ms. Hyde followed behind me and squirted each of their areas with cleaner. Then they waited until she gave them the okay to clean their area. I was surprised at the enjoyment that they got out of cleaning. She later explained to me that they loved to clean their desks and she allowed them to anytime that they wanted. After clean up, they enjoyed fresh cookies and played with yo-yos and blow toys from their grab bags. After the birthday party, we sat down to watch a movie. Ms. Hyde explained that we would not be doing anything else for the day, but I found it impossible to leave when they were fighting over who was going to sit next to me on the floor. I made a compromise and they all snuggled close to me as we sat down to watch “The Little Mermaid”. Their attention span only lasted for about twenty minutes before I saw yo-yos flying across the room. One student was told to put his yo-yo away twice, so he received a reminder for the day. Halfway through the movie, Ms. Hyde turned on the lights and everyone gathered their back packs to go home. They all had cubbies in the room, but kept their backpacks

*Names have been changed for confidentiality.*
in their lockers in the hallway. Since the kindergarten room is in a separate building from the other classes, we waited outside for each parent to pick up their child (There is no bus service).

My favorite thing about Ms. Hyde’s room is the set up. At this particular school, there is only one kindergarten class. She has three different rooms in the class and doors connect them. The middle room has windows on both sides so that she can always see what is happening in the other rooms. The first room is her office along with her assistant, Connie’s* desk, two stoves, a refrigerator, and plenty of storage space. The middle room is designed as a more natural classroom. The tables form a semi circle abound the board. In the back corner is an old-fashioned bath tub decorated with butterflies and filled with pillows. This is a place where the children can go to look at books. The third room filled with stations and play areas. Each station in the room focuses on a different area. One station is science. There, the students can play in sand, look at rocks, and explore different things. There is house station (always the favorite), a puzzle station, a community station with cars, post offices, and people, and other stations that let children learn, explore, and have fun at the same time.

The second day that I visited Ms. Hyde’s room, I really had the chance to experience what it is like to be a kindergarten teacher. The first thing we did was go to lunch. When we got to the cafeteria, I wondered how Ms. Hyde does it sometimes. Every student needed help opening their fruit cup, sticking their straw in their drink, opening their milk, or cutting their hotdog. Ms. Hyde had to repeatedly remind them to use inside voices and warn them they would not get to go outside to recess. After lunch, It was time for recess. Since this school has all grade levels, there were seventh grades outside at the same time as the kindergartners. There is not a playground, so the students play on a blacktop area. Some of the children played ball while others played hide-in-go-seek and jump rope. Ms. Hyde and I held the rope for the children to jump. Ms. Hyde and Carol took turns watching the students to make sure that they did not wonder behind any of the buildings. After recess it was time for nap, where not many of the students sleep. Even though they had to lie there, they were very well behaved and stayed on

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their cot until naptime was over. During nap, I observed each student and paid attention to how easily children can amuse themselves. I also helped prepare juice for snack. Unlike the other day, the rest of this day was full of learning. I helped Ms. Hyde teach the students about the letter “P” by using a blow up doll and the students practiced writing the letter. We also studied fossils that day. Ms. Hyde read a book on the development of fossils and let the children answer questions in between. The day ended with playing at stations. During this time, I was the child and one little girl was the teacher at the school station.

My next couple of days with Ms. Hyde’s class was very eventful. I played with action figures at recess, watched each excited child during show-in-tell, and taught them about how the pilgrims came over on a ship. I enjoyed watching the creativity come out in each student as they painted pictures, told me about their weekend plans, and make feather owls. When I knew that my fifteen hours were complete, I continued to stay because of how much fun I was having with the class.

I would have to say that I think that mentoring is one of the best experiences for a teacher. This whole project reminded why I have always wanted to be a teacher and reassured me of the enjoyment that I will find in my career. I feel that I am now several steps closer to having the tools I need to be a successful educator. I think that the reason I enjoyed the kindergarten class more is because I was able to spend more time there. The one thing that I would do differently next time is to experience more classrooms. Other than that, it was an eye opening experience.