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### **Final Reflection Paper**

As a preservice teacher, the most important thing is to have an open mind and get a hands-on experience before getting into the field. During the Spring semester, I had a professor ask our class if we would want to teach in Urban schools. I would have never thought of teaching there, but after doing the Philadelphia Urban Seminar, I know that I want to teach in the Urban area. This experience has opened my eyes and the realization that these schools need teachers the most, and a teacher that can make a change. I have learned so much from not only my host teacher, but from my students. They have all allowed me to see that the color of someone's skin is not an identification of that individual. However, when reading the article, "Understanding Diversity, Accepting Others: Realities and Directions" it is important to praise diversity, and consider it when teaching a class. The presence of diversity allows knowledge to be gained. The experience has been the most rewarding thing I have ever done, and I cannot wait to start my career.

Before coming to Philadelphia, I tried to refrain from morphing stereotypes, and clear my mind so I would reach the full capacity of the experience. The one assumption I had, was that the school itself would not be the best learning environment. I was completely wrong. When we first pulled up to the school on the first day, we were all a little taken back. The building that was classified as the "school", looked more like a factory or a prison. However, as soon as I step my foot in the door, it was a beautiful school. The hallways were filled with a book list with how many books the

students have read, and letters that the students have written with their photo above it. There were many murals from famous books like, *Junie B. Jones* and *Where the Wild Things Are*. Next to my classroom door was a canvas painting of Junie B. Jones and a poodle. The classroom itself was vibrant. There was a tall ceiling, with grand windows, a vast library, and a word wall. The word wall consisted of words the students should all know by this time of the year. The students had their own little mailboxes with their pictures on it. My host teacher, Ms. Rooney had such an unconditional love for all her students, which allowed some extra light to shed in the classroom. However, the basement of the school took me back. The cafeteria did not look a place for students to eat. The food was not healthy for the students which shocked me, due to how they help two assemblies promoting good health during the duration of my time in the school. The gym exhibited a jail cell. It was all cinderblock, with poles in the middle of the area. I did not understand how the students were supposed to be active in that environment. Other than these two rooms in the school, it was a really nice building.

When working with students, I gained a lot of positivity from them. My second day, I assessed my student Jayden Garcia, on his alphabet. When we got to the letter “Q”, he was unable to identify it. So, before I marked it wrong, I went through and sang the alphabet with him. After, “L, M, N, O, P” I paused and waited for him to say the letter Q. When he finally said Q and connected it with the physical appearance, he learned what it was. I showed him the letter, had him repeat it repeatedly, flipped the paper over and then asked him to identify the letter. I taught a student something on my second day and to me that was a feeling I crave. I loved the love my students had for me. Every time we went into the hallway the girls and some boys all asked to hold my hand. I did not want to upset anyone, so I just reminded them how we walk in the hallways with our hands at our sides. Lixander and Mason A, would brighten up my morning every day. When

they would see me, they greeted me with a hug and told me I was the prettiest teacher they ever saw and that they love me. These moments with the kids, are the moments that I look forward too as a future educator.

What surprised me during this trip, was not so much about my students, but about myself. I was impressed with the amount of patience I had with the kids. I did not raise my voice too often, unless it was necessary. There were times when my students had trouble transitioning so I would raise my voice to get them to hurry. I gained a backbone doing this trip as well. With my little cousins, I usually allow them to do whatever they please, but with my students “no” was a word frequently used in my vocabulary when speaking to them. My one student Fa-Fa asked to go to the restroom every ten minutes, so I only allowed her to go once in the morning and once at the end of the day. Her and Krystal got to a point where they just went to the bathroom to socialize. Having Jayden Hernandez in my class, granted me a ton of a patience. Jayden was my student with an IEP, but has yet to be classified as having profound autism. Jayden had really good moments, but also very extreme hard moments. My third day there, Jayden was having a rough day. I was responsible for taking him to his reading group and math groups on the second floor. The only issue was, he would run away from me or run ahead. What struck me is how clever Jayden is. He may not know his alphabet, or numbers, but he is wise. The day before he left his pencil in Mr. Paul’s classroom and before going to Ms. Rosen’s the next day he barged into Mr. Paul’s to retrieve his pencil. After he got back from his reading group he was bouncing off the walls. He was yelling and decided to take the chairs and make a fort with them right in front of the doorway. Ms. Rooney then grabbed him, and put the chairs the way they were. After that, Jayden decided to leave the classroom and my host teacher ran after him. I could keep the rest of the class quiet. Then during the next transition, Jayden ran to the bottom of the stairs and just laid there. However, on my last

day he was an angel. He sat on my lap and colored with me all day. He gave me so much love and grew a trust for me. As the time of my presence went on, Jayden grew more trust for me and chose me to walk with him. I was so happy to see him even play and learn with the kids in Science on the last day, because usually he is isolated. I was surprised with the patience I had, and I loved that I was able to gain experience with IEP friendly students, since I am a dual major.

I really enjoyed this experience with my students. I would not change anything, except for trying to connect with them more. I wish I had time to sit and read with all my students during reader's workshop. If I could have, I would have loved to teach them a lesson, but in hindsight I believe I taught each of them something during my duration there. Whether that lesson was to be kind, not to tattle-tale on peers, or to just mannerisms, I know I got something through to my students. The only thing that bothered me was during my first three days I shared my class with another student on the seminar. The student did not have a class to go to, but it split up the work and the connection within the first couple days. One of my students even called me by her name on my last day, which was kind of upsetting. That is the only thing I wish that was completely avoided during this experience.

A learning experience that I could apply to any setting is having an open mind. This experience would not have reached its full capacity with a narrow mind. I was fortunate enough to come into it every open. When in a new setting, it is important to refrain from making judgements or assumptions about people. Creating attributes about people and areas, leaves a wall between people. It has a gap, and if people are unable to have an open mind, success and knowledge will never be retrieved. However, when in the Urban school I experienced something more unique to that particular setting. I went to a very suburban high school, with all different kinds of people. Being white was the minority, even though I was at a suburban school. When I went to my school,

Clara Barton, it allowed me to realize that yes there are differences between all of us, and there are also similarities. Diversity adds to curriculum, and is important to recognize and be aware of it. You want your students to see attributes of themselves reflected into lessons, and the environment of the classroom. I enjoyed being in the urban setting, because it reminded me of my high school and allowed me to see how diversity was praised.

Doing the article readings were a tad tedious, but necessary when on this trip. They were relevant as to what we saw in our schools each day. The article I read, “How Schools Can Foster Resiliency in Children” had the greatest impact on me due to the direct connection to some of my students. The article addresses how one of the greatest challenges facing today’s district-level policymakers and the educational leaders is avoiding adverse outcomes such as failing school, using stances like alcohol and drugs, abuse, teen pregnancy and delinquency. In order to address these issues there must be a notion of resiliency. There must be an identification of the risk factors in the child’s life and services provided to eliminate those conditions. An interesting thing I read in the article, is it said labeling a student “at risk” has lowered expectations based on the child’s deficits. As the teacher, it is important to not see the student for where they come from, but for their drive to learn. Common traits the teacher can use in the classroom to help the student is have social competence. Having a stable relationship with the student helps them build motivation. My student Amenah, was classified as a B reader and she would easily give up when reading a book. Having a motivation teacher, and peers help her made her want to read. She left for a half hour each day with Syire and Krystal to go to a reading specialist for group reading. Another tactic is to use the curriculum to the best of the student. Build upon what the interest the students, have the option of different subjects and extra-curricular options. My students loved going to art class and expressing their emotions into drawing. For instructional strategies, it is evident that not every

student learns the same, so use differential instruction to the best advantage. Budgets is also a huge issue, especially in the urban education. My teacher told me a lot of things she has donated to the classroom. A lot of the books, the markers, the sticky notes were all from my host teacher. The classroom was however a good learning environment for the students. It is important as a preservice teacher to analyze these educational practices and apply them.

When doing the Philadelphia Urban Seminar, I was able to witness many issues in the education and within the children that can impact their education. While I was there, I went to a meeting facilitated by a lady from UPenn to address a Zoology curriculum that has been researched. Students enjoy learning about animals, and a lot of what was shown was around animals. If the teachers decided to take part in this, they would have to do everything with fidelity. It did not give them much freedom for their classroom, but had lessons already made up. I think the study was a different approach to teaching, but I did not like that there was not much flexibility for the teacher. For my students, some come from rough parts of the city. During my first week, on Thursday, Ameenah came into school saying all her windows were broken when her family woke up. May I recall, it was pouring rain that day. When her mother came to pick her up she explained that they woke up and every window in all three cars was broken. No bricks or rocks were present in the vehicles, and nothing was stolen. However, I cannot even begin to imagine waking up to even one window in my car broken then having to drive a child to school when it is pouring rain outside. Parent participation within a child's education does not always reflect how well a student will do. One of my brightest students Kayla, had a mom who was not even home half the time. Her mother was in Las Vegas while I was there and her godmother dropped her off at the school at 7:30am which the school did not allow. So, Kayla was out the rest of the week. Luckily, that girl is all about learning. She loves to sing, dance, and read. It just was a shame to see her mother not care

as much about her. When Kayla did return, she came in late and told me her mom was back but left her the one night and she was at home babysitting her two-year-old cousin. This girl is 6 years old and should not have that responsibility. I am just proud of how adamant Kayla is about learning, and I know she will go far in life.

After doing this urban experience, my perceptions of teaching these students has changed because I have come to the realization that it is where I want to look for a job after I get my degree. Before I would have never even thought of teaching in Urban schools, but now I know they need educators who are hard-working and willing to make a change for their students. Patience is a good factor to have when teaching in the urban schools, and I have a load of it. I know that teaching to Urban students is what I am meant to do.

I have gained professionalism skills by realizing as an educator I am my students friend and leader to success. I have gained the ability to tell a child no, and get them to behave. The literacy teacher in that school, Ms. Fulley had great classroom management and she even told me that as teacher that is key. I saw poor classroom management when I went to social studies with my students. They acted out of control, talked while the teacher was reading, and did not even stay within their box on the rug. I felt obligated to control them, so I did. I told them to sit and listen to the teacher. I gained professionalism from this experience.

During the seminar, I was placed at Clara Barton Elementary school in a Kindergarten classroom, with Ms. Rooney as my host teacher. The classroom and school were very vibrant in color and had a great attitude about reading, and trying to push for great attendance. The school is evaluated on their attendance since the school is only K-3 and there are no PSSA's. The community around it was not rich or clean. However, I do not want to misidentify it because we only looked at it from a window. I did notice sirens going on often, and some buildings that got into fires. I

enjoyed my classroom very much and was more than happy with my teacher and students. Thanks to an amazing host teacher, who taught me so much I could reach the full capacity of this experience. My students were loving, and I will always have a spot for room 107 in my heart as I continue my journey as becoming a teacher.



## Work Cited

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