



English 3100

Portfolio 3 – Final Draft

I will never forget my high school speech class. It was one of the most fun classes I have ever had; especially fun on the day we had a substitute. I can still remember all the laughter as we returned our books to the closet and locked them away while our sub returned the keys to the office. This happened twice before the Principal came to our room to scald us, not only for repeatedly putting away our books, but also for throwing a pair of band shoes at the substitute and for repeatedly banging on the gong. If you hadn't noticed, my speech class was held in the band room, which made it that much more amusing. I laughed so hard that day, but I'm sure my substitute did not find the same humor in the day's events. She had no control, no authority, over our classroom. As a future educator, I often wonder what effect my quiet personality will have on my ability to demonstrate authority with my students. Having had the opportunity to observe and study a classroom environment with a teacher whose personality is very similar to my own, I have discovered that someone with a quiet personality can demonstrate authority and effectively run a classroom, as long as the classroom is a structured community.

The community I observed was a 5th grade classroom in the Ferguson Florissant School District. The shared goals of the community are to acquire knowledge in order to meet district objectives (standards) and move on to the next grade level. Intercommunication occurs by meeting Monday through Friday from 8:50am to 3:20pm. Students communicate with the teacher by handing in assignments in their morning work folder and also through a daily planner. The classroom has many genres such as textbooks for each subject, worksheets, daily planners,

progress reports and report cards. Report cards are a good way of communicating to students and their parents of how well they are doing in class, or how close they are to reaching the classroom shared goals. The classroom has several lexis's as well like the "morning work folder," "marking pencil" and morning "Bell Work."

Going in, I expected the students to be noisy and disruptive, but to my surprise the class was extremely quiet and orderly. I arrived at 9:00am on a Monday morning. The students were working quietly on their "Bell Work." Bell work is a routine assignment posted on the white board daily. The students know upon entering the classroom to sit quietly and begin the morning bell work; a well-structured practice that sets the tone for a smooth running morning. As the students sit quietly working, the teacher asks, "Anyone have lunch money?" The collection of money ran smoothly and one student was selected to take the money down to the office. A three minute warning on bell work was given by the teacher. The students continued to work quietly until the teacher states, "We are starting on language, 'marking pencils' on your desk please." The students proceeded to take out their "marking pencils," a colored pencil, other than blue or black, which is used when the students grade their own assignments together as a class.

The students were working so quietly, there was little for me to record in my field notes. During this time I observed a few things about the classroom environment. There were 22 students in the class 7 boys and 15 girls. The students' desks were grouped in 6 rows with 4 to 5 desks in each one. All students' desks were facing the whiteboards in the front of the classroom. The teacher's desk was positioned behind the students were she could observe their behavior at all times. There are several bulletin boards around the classroom. The one to my right has several charts listing the parts of speech, sound words, shape words, and movement words. The board to my left has math posters hung telling how to find the mean, median, range, and mode of a set of

numbers, and how to convert fractions and decimals to percent values and vice versa. A third bulletin board in the back of the classroom displayed the words “Character Traits” in big gold letters along with posters defining positive traits like responsibility, integrity, respect, trustworthiness, honesty, fairness, citizenship, compassion, perseverance and self-discipline. The teacher informed me during our interview that most things had been removed from the walls because of MAP testing the previous week. The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) enables teachers to get a snapshot of student proficiencies in relation to the Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs). These assessments give teachers valuable diagnostic information that can be used to determine if the students are meeting the classroom shared goals as well.

The Language Arts lesson was conducted as a group lesson where the entire class was involved. Students were given a worksheet on grammar and punctuation. After a few minutes, the teacher began to call on students to read a sentence with the correct format. Even when the students were asked to speak out loud, the classroom was extremely quiet. The students read in a whisper. The teacher had to instruct several students to reread the sentences so the entire class could hear them. The students used their marking pencils to grade their assignments and placed them in their “Morning Work Folder.” The morning work folder was collected each day before lunch with all morning assignments included. This is a form of intercommunication from students to teacher which allows the teacher to assess students’ performance and understanding of the day’s work.

Through all the silence, I could hear the teacher from the neighboring classroom scolding her students. “If you want me to be mean, I can be mean! The last 5 weeks [of school] can be good or bad for you.” The fussing from her classroom eventually ended and was replaced by a very enthusiastic Mathematics lesson. Later during my interview with my classroom teacher I

learned that the neighboring teacher had been absent the previous Friday and her students had behaved very poorly for the substitute. I also learned that her classroom is usually very orderly and that she loved to teach math. The teacher also informed me that her least favorite subject to teach was Math, her favorite being Language Arts. “My students score higher on the MAP test than the other two 5th grade classrooms, while her students score higher in Math.” I suggested that the neighboring teacher teach Math to all 5th grade classes and that she should teach Language Arts, in order to benefit all the children. This idea had been brought up, but a third 5th grade teacher was unwilling to cooperate. The class had run so smoothly, I asked the teacher was the class always this orderly? She stated that it was Monday morning and the class was still tired from the weekend, “Friday afternoon is the complete opposite.”

I decided to see what the teacher meant and returned to the school for more observations the following Friday at 1:10pm. The students were working quietly on letters for Mother’s Day. As the students finished their letters, they brought them up to the teacher for review. One student returned to her desk and softly banged her hands on her desk. This did not distract the classroom as they all continued to work quietly. Another student asked to borrow a pencil from the teacher, but instead of taking one pencil from the cup she proceeded to take the entire cup to her desk. “Please take one and set it [the pencil cup] back down,” stated the teacher. The same student who slammed her hand on the desk stood at the teacher’s desk and accidentally kicked the metal leg causing a loud boom. Finally the class and the teacher laugh out loud in an uproar. Control is regained quickly and the class was back working quietly. Soon the students in front of my seat began to whisper. Another student is asked to throw away whatever she is chewing on. The class was beginning to get louder and I now could see what the teacher meant. The teacher regained order in the classroom by stating in a low firm tone, “Class, if you are done with the assignment,

take out a book and be quiet. Do not disturb the other students and please red over your work. Some of your mistakes can be corrected if you proof read your work.”

The students are then instructed to prepare for the Math lesson. “Take out your notebook and copy down the three rules on the board for multiplying integers.” A timer is set and the students are instructed to study the rules and recite them to their “table partner” when the buzzer sounds. The teacher was able to discuss something with a fellow teacher as the class worked quietly. The class came back together after a few minutes for more note taking. I can tell a difference in the way the lesson is going. It is not running as smoothly as the Language Arts lesson I had previously observed. The teacher seemed frustrated with the students because some did not know their multiplication facts. She made several statements like, “Multiplication facts always come back to haunt you, so you may as well memorize and know them,” and “If I were you I would spend the summer learning my multiplication facts!” The teacher was really annoyed when she stated, “Stop guessing, the rules are on the board. Nobody is trying to trick you!” I also noticed a student tapping on his desk and playing around. This disrupted the lesson, forcing the teacher to warn the student that he would be put out of the classroom if he did not stop.

Through all my observations, I have determined that unlike my poor high school substitute, this 5th grade teacher has the authority in her classroom. Her students respect her and the classroom generally runs smoothly. She earned a Bachelor’s degree (which is a requirement for all teachers) in Elementary Education from the University of Missouri in St. Louis. This is her 6th year of teaching and she was tenured at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. Becoming a tenured teacher gives you more authority over newer, non-tenured teachers and most importantly, job security. The next level of authority can be achieved by receiving your Master’s

degree which will earn you more money as a teacher. The longer you are teacher the more experience you will have. This also grants you more authority and respect in your job. The highest authority figure in the school is the Principal, followed by the Counselor (since there is currently no Assistant Principal) and the “Teacher in Charge,” a teacher with a Master’s degree of stands in for the Principal when he is out of the building. There are also teacher’s aids and playground assistants who have less authority than teachers in the schools.

The 5th grade teacher I observed also had different levels of authority within her own classroom. She demonstrated a higher level of authority when teaching the language arts lesson — her favorite subject to teach. The class was very quiet and orderly and she seemed to enjoy herself more. During the Math lesson, the teacher was frustrated and the class was more disruptive as a result. The time of my observations may have played a part in the classroom differences as well, since the Language Arts lesson was on Monday morning while the Math lesson I observed was on Friday afternoon.

The students also demonstrated different levels of authority. I noticed that certain students would act out to try and gain authority in the class. The student tapping on his desk during the math lesson and the students who whispered during the letter writing assignment all caused the teacher to stop what she was doing to scold them. An extreme example of students trying to gain attention and authority would be when a female student in the class placed a soiled sanitary napkin in a student’s chair. The teacher had to send all the male students out of the room to reprimand the female ones. The teacher never found out who actually brought it in, but assumed that it belonged to the student whose chair it was placed on. Especially since the student was the one who picked it up and placed it in the trash can.

There were also students who had gained authority in the classroom in a positive manner. Fourteen of the students in the classroom have been in the teacher's class for more than one year, 8 students since the 3rd grade and 6 since the 4th. These students are more familiar with the teacher's classroom rules and structure and cooperate more in class. One of these students was chosen to take the lunch money down to the office. The student who slammed her hand on her desk was new to the class this year. The teacher also has more authority over the students who have looped with her for 2 years. Looping is when a teacher moves up a grade level with her students in order to keep the class together. This is beneficial because it grants the teacher more time in the classroom by not having to become acquainted with new students each year and by not having to teach the classroom rules and expectations over and over again. This is also beneficial to students because they will already know their teacher, their classmates, and what is expected of them.

Through my observations, I wanted to see whether having a quiet personality would be a hindrance to my teaching career and take away from my authority. The reason I chose this particular 5th grade class to observe is that the teacher is my mother. We both share a similar quiet personality. I was pleased to see how orderly her classroom ran. It seems as though her quiet personality rubbed off on her students — her demeanor set the tone for the classroom. This was especially noticeable when she taught her favorite subject, Language Arts. The most important thing I learned from this experience is that despite your personality traits, you must run a well-structured classroom environment. The students worked quietly and knew what the teacher expected from them. A daily classroom schedule was written on the white boards, and each student's daily planner helped them to stay on track with assignments and homework.

Another lesson I have learned is that you must love what you do in order to maintain the level of authority required to run a smooth classroom. That is why I have chosen to teach Math — my absolute favorite subject!