

Capstone Reflection

Name of Preservice Teacher _____ Rachell Dewell _____
Name of Mentor Teacher _____ Mrs. Heidi Meyers _____
Email of Mentor Teacher _____ hmeyers@clsfw.org _____
Dates of Capstone _____ May 7, 2012 – May 9, 2012 _____
Grade(s) Taught _____ 5th _____
Location _____ Concordia Lutheran School, Fort Wayne, IN _____
Subjects Taught _____ Reading, Spelling, Vocabulary, Writing (ELA) _____

Brief Summary

I did my capstone experience with the 5th grade class at Concordia Lutheran School. There were 28 students total in the class, but for these three days I taught 27 of them (one was absent for the three days). Interestingly enough, the day I arrived a new student who just moved to town joined the class! Each day, I had an hour and a half block in the morning to teach. It was a very exciting three days.

I taught an introductory unit on “Number the Stars”. The first day was centered on learning and discussing the historical setting of the novel because the time period is very important to understanding the plot. I taught the historical setting by using a Prezi and giving the students handouts to help them follow along. I also brought in many books about the Holocaust and World War II for the students to look through after the presentation. Once the students had sufficient time to browse through the materials, I asked them to write a short journal reflection about what they learned and why they think it is important to study history through literature. I planned to read the first chapter out loud to them, but did not have time.

By the second day, the students read the first two chapters and were introduced to many of the characters. After teaching the first few vocabulary words by using context clues, I broke the class into random groups of three. In these groups, the students were assigned a character to become an expert on. After some small group discussion, each group was able to share their character with the rest of the class so everyone knew all the characters. Also this day, we identified a main point of the first two chapters and discussed which events supported that main idea. The students had two handouts to help them take notes and copy information on the discussions. I had one other activity linking the characters and the main events, but I ran out of time.

The third day, we sorted and ordered the main events of chapters three and four and discussed the important behind these main events. Then we plotted all the events thus far on a story map. We identified the introduction and the conflict. Mrs. Meyers will continue to fill out the story map as the class continues the novel. After that, we had a discussion on three main themes that begin to show up in “Number the Stars”. I showed a video that applied to each theme, and after each video we had a sort discussion on how we see the video apply to the book and our lives. One piece I forgot to do (and probably wouldn't have had time for) was reading a passage from the book that shows the theme. The last fifteen minutes of class was a writing activity. The students were supposed to use what they knew about the main events of the first four chapters, the characters, the vocabulary, and the themes to write a letter from a character's perspective.

Since I taught in the morning, I spent the rest of the afternoon in the classroom and helping where needed. Since I knew many of the other teachers at Concordia, I stopped into other classrooms to see other grade levels and subject areas. I feel very blessed to have had a rich and successful teaching experience. I believe my lessons went smooth and were engaging and instructional for the students. I also believe my “classroom hopping” helped me see and understand other instructional practices and grade levels.

Analytical Reflection

Please reflect on the components listed below. Note strengths as well as modifications for the future.

1. *Hook* – My hook for day was started as predicting what “Number the Stars” would be about based on the cover and the novel. Then I showed a book trailer I found on YouTube. I believe the pre-reading predictions helped the students begin thinking about the book, but the movie trailer seemed more effective and sparked the students’ interest in the book, the plot, and the historical setting. My hook for day two was simple reflecting on and remembering what the class learned the day before. This I believe helped the students settle in the reading class “mode”. For day three, I planned a hook, but knew I would not have time for what I planned. For this reason, I reformatted my main lesson a little bit to make it more like a hook. The students grouped to order the main events on chapters three and four and I built in a little competition to keep it exciting for the students.

I feel that all my hooks were successful in sparking the students’ interest as they began a new unit and also helping them settle into reading class. My weakest hook I think was my third day because it led to some frustration for those who did not read and took much longer than anticipated. I also should work on transitioning my hook into my main lesson. Especially on day two, I felt my hook did not transition well into the vocabulary instruction.

2. *Tapping into prior knowledge* – I knew the 5th graders would not have any prior knowledge about World War II or the Holocaust. I would almost say I did not tap into any prior knowledge since I had to create most of it. I wish I would have tried harder to pull things from their lives that would help them connect with the historical setting, but it was hard for me to think of ways to do that. However, when teaching about World War II, I included what life was like in America and what it would have been like for a child instead of just focusing on Europe.

I did conduct a short survey to assess prior knowledge on the first day. All I really needed to know was if they have read “Number the Stars” (one girl did) and if they knew the parts to a story map. Both of these helped me understand where the class was at so I knew where to begin my instruction.

3. *Setting a purpose* – The purpose I had set for my three day unit was to understand the importance of studying history in literature. I asked the students to reflect on it in their journals and I talked about it towards the end of my Prezi. However, I did not include it in my instruction for the last two days. I did not feel the need to stress it

so much because I wanted the students to get into the book and understand the importance of the introduction, the characters, and the conflict. However, if I were teaching this whole book, I would begin to focus more on the purpose as I reach the end and wrap it up.

I also set a purpose for learning the historical setting. I helped the students understand that if they knew when and where this story was taking place, they would understand the plot more and the characters deeper. I think this was very effective because knowing the purpose for learning the historical setting applies to almost every sentence in the book.

4. *Vocabulary strategy* – To teach the vocabulary from the first four chapters, I used a matching game and context clues. I read a passage from “Number the Stars” that included the vocabulary word while the students followed along. The students were able to successfully define the word using the clues from the passage and the matching definitions. I had some students come up to draw the connecting lines between the word and its definition. I also asked the students to include three words in their character letter (on day three) so they can practice using the words in writing and knowing the definition. The context clues and matching were very successful, but the using the words in the letter was not as successful. Some students did not include words, other only used one or two. To help with this, I think I would teach more vocabulary words before I have the students use them in writing. This will supply more word options for them. If I kept the same amount of words, I would lower the requirement to two words.

5. *Comprehension strategy* – I used a variety of comprehension strategies. Identifying a main idea from the first two chapters and using the events to support that main idea worked very well. I identified the main idea for them and the students were very successful in supporting that idea with material from the novel. Sorting the main events in order on day three worked well too. It would have worked even better if every student had read though. Beginning to fill in a story map for “Number the Stars” I think helped with comprehension too. I refreshed the students on what “introduction” and “conflict” meant and the students were able to pull events from the story to fit those elements. There were also spaces for characters, setting, and themes on the handout.

One comprehension strategy I wish I would have had time for was a chart that would help students link the characters wants and feeling to the events of the story. I would like to use this next time when I teach this.

6. *Methodology* – In each lesson, I used many different instructional strategies to teach the lesson. Mrs. Meyers said she was very impressed by the level of differentiated instruction I included in my lessons. I tried to reach as many students as possible by using hands on activities, handouts, videos, discussion, and small group work. From what I could tell, the variety of methodologies was effective and engaged most of the students for most of the time. The videos were definitely the class favorite and probably the most effective.

One thing I would improve on though is giving clear directions. The students were helpful in asking great questions that helped fill in the gaps in my instructions, but I

want to make sure I guide the students smoothly from one methodology to the next with clear and precise instruction.

7. *Organization of lesson plans* – Overall, I think the organization was well planned out and executed well. The lessons progressed in a logical manner that allowed the students to learn effectively. One change I would make though it to have the letter writing activity take place sooner after the character discussion and have the theme discussion afterwards. The themes and videos interrupted the students work on getting to know the characters. Both activities worked well in the classroom, but the ordering could be better. The most well organized day I think was the first day. The introduction went smooth and transitioned well into the historical background. After the Prezi on the historical setting, the students eagerly browsed through the Holocaust and World War II books then were able to write informative and thoughtful reflections. I think this first, successful day was perfect for sparking the students' interest for the rest of the novel.

8. *Assessment* – Through this experience, I learned that assessment will take time and practice for me. My formal assessment was the grading rubric for the character letter. As I was grading, I became more and more dissatisfied with my rubric. I found that I did not really know what I wanted in the letters and as I was grading I felt myself become more lenient on my expectations. It was also hard for me to give really good students a lower grade because they did not follow the rubric. Being subjective is a part of assessment and that will take me time to learn and practice. However, I still want to look at the student and assess how it matched up to their ability level. Maybe rubrics are not my favorite assessment tools and I need to find what works for me, the students, and the assignment.

The other in class work was not formally assessed, but I still collected the handouts to look at the students work and leave feedback for them. This turned out to be really effective for me as the teacher. When I began to grade the letters, I already had an idea of what the student's work would be like. Maybe I should have adjusted my rubric once I knew the level of work the students were able to put out.

I planned on using checklists to conduct informal assessment, but I found that I did not have to specifically assess each student. What I found to be most effective was walking around the classroom and observing/listening to the students group or individual work. This simply assessed if the students were on task and if they understood what to do and discuss. I also asked many questions during my lessons to assess their knowledge, what they were retaining, and what they could infer. I would much prefer informal assessment in the classroom by walking around and observing and asking questions during the lesson. I think I want to find a way to record these observations and in class discussion participation so I have a number to record in the grade book.

9. *Class management* – I used the same classroom management techniques that Mrs. Meyers had established with the students. The main behavior I had to manage was excessive chatter. When the class was talking over me or talking too loud, I simply raised my hand and the students followed suit. This quieted the class down quickly, especially if I made eye contact with the influential people in each group. Once the classroom

leaders were quite the class quickly followed their lead. During the actual lessons, I did not struggle to keep the students focused and well behaved. I think the students were highly engaged for most of the block and did not have time to misbehave. During the rest of the day, I simply helped Mrs. Meyers quiet the class and settle rowdiness quickly by simply addressing the student/group of students personally.

Mrs. Meyers keeps the students occupied during each moment she has them, and I think this keeps them from having down time to misbehave. I can also tell she has set a standard and routine of politeness and quietness in her classroom. This made it easy for me to come in and expect the same thing of them.

10. *Pacing* – I think my lessons moved at a good speed. They were steady and continuous work, but I changed the activity often enough so the students were constantly engaged and not bored. The students were able to stop me and slow me down if I was moving too fast. I could tell this by their hands popping up and asking questions. When I was moving to slow, their body language told me. When I saw students looking around the room or slouching, I knew I was moving to slow for them and could pick up the pace for them. This will take practice for me to perfect, but ultimately the pace of a lesson needs to be adjusted to the students needs. This experience helped me understand that.

Holistic Reflection

The biggest insight I gained from this experience was that I definitely want to be a Lutheran school teacher and teach 5th grade. I love being with the students and this age is very enjoyable for me. I found that these students were fun and independent. They have not developed the sassiness that middle school students can have and they still enjoy school (for the most part). As a teacher, I want to help the students enjoy school as they transition into middle school and to be independent learners. I want to teach them to be responsible for their learning to always be curious. Based on the self evaluations I gave, all the students wanted to continue reading the book and to learn more about World War II. This must mean I sparked some sort of curiosity in their minds. One student even went home and did more research! That is the kind of attitude I want to instill in my students when I have my own classroom. I was also able to freely and seamlessly integrate the faith and the Bible in my lessons. This was one of the most amazing feelings because I knew I could not only touch the students' lives with new knowledge, but I also could touch their hearts with the Gospel!

I also learned that time in the classroom goes by fast...really fast! I had so many things I wanted to try with the students but no time. This means that I will have to choose the best and most effective activities for my class. I will have to make the most out of every minute. Because I could not do everything I planned, I learned how to adjust my lesson on the spot and pick and choose what was important. I believe I did a good job at this, but I will constantly have to monitor the class and the clock. This will be an ongoing process for me since each class is different.

One of the most important things I learned over these three days was the classroom management must be built in and practice routines in the classroom. As a first year teacher, I will have to start this practice and those routines immediately. I was

blessed to have a “well trained” class! Another thing I learned about classroom management was that I will have to learn who the leaders and the most influential students are. If I can target those students and get them on board with the routines, then the class will follow. For example, there was a young boy who was obviously the most influential boy in his group of friends. I learned quickly that if I made eye contact with him and had him be quiet, all the other boys would immediately follow his actions. This helped me quiet the classroom quickly.

Finally, I learned how I develop relationships with students. I think I was able to build solid relationships with almost every student in the class even though I was only there for three days. This is one thing I was worried about being a pre-service teacher, but now that I know if you are genuinely interested in the students’ lives, they will respond to wanting to have that relationship. I also learned that I like to throw a few jokes in my lessons. I felt this kept the atmosphere light and enjoyable. I liked that feeling in the classroom, but I know I have to be careful to not let it get out of control. I also want to be careful with directing the jokes at specific students or people. The light atmosphere and genuine attitude I displayed I think helped me develop positive relationships with that wonderful class. I would gladly go back any day and teach those students. I owe each one of them a thank you for solidifying my passion for children and teaching them.