

Kerri Burmeister

General Methods

Professor Opfer

November 29, 2011

I was very blessed with the opportunity to learn from such great teachers and gain valuable ideas and resources to use on the first day of school in my classroom. First I interviewed Shelly Schluckebeer who teaches 2nd grade at Seward Elementary on November 28, 2011. I also interviewed Teri Heidemann who teaches 1st grade at Seward Elementary on November 29, 2011.

After pondering and reflecting upon these interviews, I was able to take the time to start using these ideas and thinking about how I would make them my own for my first day of school. However I know this is a new topic that will be perfected over time, but this gave me a chance to truly start getting excited about the first day of school. I feel these are valuable things to think about and will help lessen the anxiety for my first year teaching. I can only imagine at this point my first classroom and the wonderful students that fill my classroom to make not only my first day of school, but also my first year of teaching so memorable.

First off all I need to imagine my ideal classroom. As I begin to think about the first day of school I need to consider my ideal teaching job. Although I really want to start off teaching in Special Education that would be my ideal classroom, but if I had to choose a grade level I would chose 2nd grade. I would really like to be at a Lutheran school but wouldn't mind a public school either. I don't mind rural or urban schools as I have been in a several grade classroom to a huge city school. I

think these very extreme experiences in my life have really opened my eyes to positives of both, but preferably I would like a smaller rural school. Mainly for this project not only did I keep in mind the interviews but my student teaching classroom.

I would really like to be at a school with many programs such as reading mastery, special education specialty areas, music teachers, physical education teachers, paras, and etc. I want to be in a school that has supporting staff and a very positive environment with a positive principal. I also want to be in a school that forms relationships among not only students and teachers, but also teachers and staff. As of now I also see myself staying in the Nebraska area after graduating college and that is the area I'm looking for teaching jobs right now.

I have so many cute decorating ideas that I have saved on my computer for setting up my first classroom. I'm very organized so there will be a neat spot for everything within my classroom. I feel very strongly about how my class should be colorful, relaxing, inviting, and engaging all at the same time. I think that atmosphere plays a huge part in students learning.

My first thoughts are to have the student's desk arranged in rows with space between each desk. I know both the teachers I interviewed have their desks touching each other in clusters. I feel with younger children this is too much of a distraction. However I also value teamwork and group interaction to teach leadership and problem solving. With this in mind, I will have two clustered round tables in the back of the room. These tables can be used for centers or group work

when needed. However the student's desks will give them a concentration work area with fewer distractions to talk to their neighbors.

In my classroom I would also like place for group reading and group discussion, such as a rug. I think students shouldn't be concluded to their desks all day, especially at such a young age. I think rugs with pictures, number, or squares are the most beneficial so students can have an assigned sitting area. This idea has come from my student teaching where all the students fight and run to be in the first row when we do group reading time.

I also want an excluded spot dedicated to reading a lone. In this portion of the room I will have softer lighting, pillows, beanbags, blankets, and a quiet atmosphere. I think that students learn better when they can have an escape and emotional break time. With that thought, my goal is to place a fish tank one day in that area of my classroom. Fish for me have always been a stress reliever and they are very calming to watch. I think that the florescent lighting that so commonly affects our classroom is hard for the kids. Therefore I really want to focus on incorporating more lamps and such in places where possible.

I also think the walls should be educational and yet colorful. With this in mind I want pictures to let students dream at appropriate times, but also inspire and engage students to learn. With this in mind I want word walls, number grids, maps, calendars, coins, place values, pledge of allegiances, and fun bulletin boards to display a current unit's theme or art work by students.

I also believe that decorating should be done tastefully and not too distracting. My goal is to have a decorated theme each school year and decorate

accordingly. I also want my schedule to be the main focus of the classroom since I want to focus on routines. I also think that many students especially those with learning disabilities and many other kids will do better if they know what is expected of them and follow this routine.

I know that developing a positive, engaging, supportive classroom is key for the overall school year and encouraging each student to succeed. After reflecting on my interviews I think there are some great thoughts to include in this section. For example classroom roles really help let the leaders shine and feel important.

I also feel that students need so much encouragement and support early on in their life. Therefore I need to offer continual praise on the student's behalf. I want all communication both from me and other students to be positive. I won't tolerate any down play or bullying. This will have to be modeled and taught to the students, which both teachers interviewed focused upon. The idea that Mrs. Heidemann focused on was high fives and telling them daily how wonderful they are either personally or academically, I really want to incorporate this.

I want to create a character pledge for my classroom that we will say everyday after the pledge of allegiance so that students will know what is expected of them. I think rewarding good behavior will be good for my students such as eating lunch in the classroom, extra recess time, and class treats are good motivators. I will also give high fives to students and develop positive relationships with them.

These relationships between me as their teacher and themselves and them with other students will really be a focus in the first day and will drive our first day

of school activities. Both of the teachers interviewed gave me great relationship building activities that will help all of us learn about each other. I think students would also enjoy if I participated in some of the activities such as me in a bag, will help them get to know me as well.

I felt better after interviewing my teachers to learn that teachers don't always have to remember student's names on the first day. I think that knowing a child's name is a huge way to build relationships, but I was eased to know that this would come within our activities on the first day of school and come when you learn more about the child.

Parent communication is also key to a successful classroom. I want to develop relationship with parents from the start. This will also be a focus in the beginning and throughout the year. Mrs. Schluckebier told me the hardest part of teaching is dealing with the parents. Therefore communicating effectively is key with parents. I want parents to be informed and apart of their child's education, but not forced upon for those parents who are very busy working. I know all parents have different forms of communication and that will be a key to finding each child's preferred communication.

I will send home parent letters, like the attached form, the first day and throughout the school year. Upon interviewing these teachers they gave me great ideas when encouraging the parents. I liked the idea of how Mrs. Schluckebier had parents write her a letter on the first week of school about their child. This letter included child's likes and dislikes, fears, struggles, motivations, activities, situations that influence learning, books they like to read and their favorite subject. I think not

only does this build relationships with the parents, but can help teachers build relationships with our students.

I will also give out contact information from the start of the school year so that parents will have the chance to contact me with any concerns or questions. I want to make myself available to parents and keep them informed. I also think technology is a great way for us to communicate and build relationships, but need to be aware of if parents are accessible to technology. Therefore I also want to be positive with students and parents and will send notes home occasionally when a student is doing good behavior and not just bad behavior.

Establishing procedures and routines will make our classroom run smoothly. I gained great ideas from the teachers I interviewed on this topic. First procedure will include letting students help create our class rules. I want to make a big list and then combine them down to 5 overall encompassing rules. I want the students to then sign this rule sheet to show that they promise to follow these rules. I think then when rules are broken I can enforce the policy of well you promised me that you would follow these rules and help them take ownership of their actions.

I also loved Mrs. Heidemann's idea of having students brainstorm goals for the class school year both personally and academically. This gives students a role and direction over their learning, which I think is very important.

I also think that through this I can use Mrs. Heidemann's having students brainstorm ideas especially when there is a problem. This helps students feel part of the problem for what is fair and they will be more open to the enforcing or consequence. This also teaches kids positive environments and builds relationships

to know that we value their input. Plus as Mrs. Heidemann says, “kids come up with the best answers most of the time”

In terms of bathroom schedules I highly agreed with both Mrs. Schluckebeer and Mrs. Heidemann’s philosophies. I don’t want to be bogged down everyday with the asking of going to the bathroom. My rule will be to only have one girl and one boy out at time. They will then place a stuffed animal on their desk while gone so that I know where they are at all times. This bathroom rule will only be allowed during non-teaching times. This will go for water drinks as well unless either an emergency arises.

I also agree with both of my teachers interviewed about their pencil sharpening procedure. I have never really come up with any good pencil sharpening ideas until I met both of these teachers. I love their idea of having two separate pencil baskets. One will say, “sharpened pencils” and the other will say “broken pencils”. I will then take the time to sharpen these during the day so the pencil sharpening noise will not be a distraction to the students.

My fourth procedure will deal with the reading corner. My rule will be that students are not allowed to read, unless of course it is reading time, until their work is completed. They will then have to show me the completed work before reading.

Next I want to enforce the procedure of class leaders. I will have a class leader every day like both teachers interviewed. Their job will be to read the lunch menu, hand out papers, erase chalk boards, run lunch count to office, closing doors, leading calendar and pledges, and other odd jobs. Most of these jobs I got from the teachers I interviewed.

Next I want to focus on discipline procedures. Both of the teachers interviewed talked about how enforcing routines and class procedures are key early on in the year. In the school year Mrs. Schluckebier said it is better to be really strict with them at the beginning and then back off or let up slightly later in the coming weeks. Mrs. Schluckebier's policy is that they miss recess for misbehavior or not getting their work done. However I'm not sure this is the best policy for some of those very proactive boys. I think that if they miss recess they need to channel that energy somehow with class jobs or get fresh air somehow. Maybe a better punishment would be having them eat lunch on their own.

I also think Mrs. Heidemann had a good point about role playing good and bad behavior throughout the year which will be good modeling. I also like how both teachers focused on good behavior such as collecting Clifford bones for good class acts, drawing pictures with parts and receiving class rewards when the picture is fully drawn, or putting names in a basket for individual prizes if name drawn at the end of the week. I want to take all these ideas to focus both on individual and class good behavior.

In terms of turning in homework I will make students show me a few problems of each worksheet so that I know if they get the concepts. Then I will have three stackable bins. One bin will be the "turn in" bin on the top for completed homework. The next bin will be the printed worksheet ready to hand out for the day in paperclips. This will make grabbing worksheets during lessons quick and simple. The last bin will be graded homework. This will be handed back at appropriate times. I will have students put this directly into their take home folder to go home.

My last and final procedure will be teaching students how to walk in the hallways. I will require zero voice in the hallways as to not distract other classrooms. I will expect them to walk. I will hold a zero sign on my hand throughout the halls to remind them to stay quiet. Also if needed to get attention in the classroom we will discuss the “give me 5” where students give me five fingers and pause everything. We will also discuss body basics and how to properly sit into their chairs or on the floors.

Although these are just a few of class rules and procedures there are many more that I will incorporate into my future classroom and these rules and procedures I’m willing to adjust when needed to fit the specific needs of my classroom.

Although there are many more thoughts and ideas about my classroom in the future, I anxiously await for that day. After interviewing all these teachers and getting activities and handouts I can’t wait to not only experience the first day of school but also my first year of teaching.

Dear parents of second grade,

First off I want to tell you how truly bless and excited I am to have your children in my classroom. I hope this will be a positive school year for your child in which they not only grow academically but personally as well. I want to make their learning an overall positive experience that I hope you will join in me in this role of support throughout the year.

I want to encourage you keep the communication with both your child and me open throughout the year. It is my first and most important role is to build relationships with each of students and get to know them better. In order to first help me get to know your child best please take some time to write me an informal letter including what you want me to know about your child, your child's likes and dislikes, feelings about school and learning, favorite topics or books, situations that make him or her feel uncomfortable, how they learn best, situations that influence their learning or behaviors, friends or family that is important to them, and favorite out of school activities. I would appreciate these only at your early convenience and can be either hand written or emailed.

Our classroom will focus on positive behavior in many ways. I would like to send notes home at your preferred communication preference not only when problems arise but also good behaviors occur. We will encourage both individual and classroom good behavior in many ways. The class will work towards earning marbles to fill a jar to gain class rewards such as eating lunch in the classroom, watching cartoons during lunch, extra recess time, class party, snack time, or other fun activities. In terms of individual good behaviors, students can write their names on sheets of paper to put in a basket. Each child will get a new slip of paper for each good behavior. A drawing will happen at the end of the week. Those students will gain individual rewards such as small prizes, rights to work at the teacher's desk, using the iPad during recess, and other good reward.

However when a problem does arise I will first settle in a one-on-one situation with your child. The student will be asked to brainstorm ways in which we can fix this situation so it won't occur again. This will be their warning. If you child has offended another child they will be expected to apologize and confront other student. Next if the behavior occurs again they will have to write out their own discipline and action plan during recess. The next step of discipline will be to write a letter home to you as parents explaining their actions that keep occurring and asking for your thoughts to their possibility of conflict resolutions they have brainstormed. Lastly if this is a problem behavior the last resort will then be the principal even though I believe this should be settled within our own classroom first.

In terms of class discipline the class as whole can lose part of the rewards if needed. This will mean losing a marble or point out of the jar. I feel is part of students to be involved in their making of class rules and promising to follow them as well as being

supported in their discipline strategies as needed. I want students to be proactive learners and encouraged to do their best.

In terms of homework throughout the school year, students will have a take home folder. One side will be marked "homework" and the other will be marked "home". Please check your child's folder daily for both parent notes and completed homework. Please also encourage students to complete their homework, as there will not be very much throughout the year. I also want to encourage you to help your child with their spelling list each week when the test will be on Fridays.

I want to thank you all in advance for your continuing support throughout this school year to come. However if you have any concerns, questions, comments, or thoughts please feel free to email me, call me, or write me a note. Please do not hesitate to contact me either at kerri.b@mac.com or 636-577-3540.

I look forward to working with you as well as making this an enjoyable school year.

Thank you,