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STUDENT NUMBER – 28201620

**EDF4120 LEARNING AT THE HEART
OF TEACHING**

ASSIGNMENT TASK 2

PART 1 – INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

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This report investigates observations collected during my professional placement period at a Primary school in a grade three classroom. My understanding about learning before starting was that it is a one way instructional activity and a simple act of transferring knowledge and skills. I never considered the importance of knowing the audience in order to make teaching relevant.

CONTEXT

The school was a multicultural setting in the outskirts of the city with students from more than fifty different nationalities having diverse linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds. They came from families who have lived in Melbourne for many generations to those who have recently immigrated. As a result, ethos of the school is focused on inclusion. Building a community environment was central to the school's philosophy and through professional development, teachers worked collaboratively to develop a well-rounded schooling experience for all students. Through rigorous student-centred curriculum, teachers ensured that every child worked to his or her maximum potential. Special attention was given to students with diverse academic, social and language needs. They also followed a collaborative approach to learning with groups and teams for every class activity.

OBSERVATIONS

It was observed that students' backgrounds played a huge role in framing their learner identities. As majority of students belonged to ESL (English as a Second Language) category, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds affected their literacy as well as numeracy learning abilities. A student was unable to actively construct knowledge because the external world he was interacting with in school was not in a language he understood. In grade three, he could not read or follow instructions in English. Therefore, he was unable to understand grammatical concepts or math word problems. This led to him being in a state of constant disequilibrium until an external used Vygotsky's scaffolding method to assist him in understanding ideas. As his existing schemas were built in a different social and cultural context at home (including a different language setting), translating and then accommodating new knowledge into

old schemas was a developmentally challenging process for him. Vygotsky's theory includes the relationship of thought and language and how language usage through interaction was required before thinking could even exist (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

According to Hawkins (2005), people's identities are formed due to a process of ongoing negotiation between the individual and the social context or environment, with specific importance on operant cultural and power relations. As a result, him and children in similar positions found it difficult to form an identity outside of their homes and were not able to comfortably engage with classmates.

An individual learning plan was made for students with such difficulties. They were placed in a social context similar to their native English speaking classmates. An external came in on a regular basis to take them on imaginary social events such as picnics to build on their oral language skills. This relates to strategies developed by second language acquisition theorists and researchers who have proffered varied perspectives on language and literacy development. In their opinion, generally, the field is moving from a view of the learner as "a one-dimensional acquisition device" (Pennycook, 2001, p. 143)—with a focus on individual traits and cognitive processes as key to understanding the process of learning—to a focus on language and literacy development as situated social processes. The latter involves understanding the acquisition of languages and literacies as always occurring in and through interactions with others in specific (social) contexts (Hawkins, 2005, p. 59).

The class teacher documented children's interests in the form of videos to plan lessons. This was an important aspect of lesson planning to ensure familiar concepts made knowledge acquisition easy and permanent. She drew on their 'funds of knowledge' to extend their repertoires of practices. If students are given examples that they can relate to on an emotional, or even a cognitive basis, the ability to retrieve new information when needed implies that schema was constructed based on a personal logical reasoning process (Powell & Kalina, 2009). In relation, classrooms followed a collaborative learning approach in a social constructivist environment. Students were homogeneously grouped for class activities. This enabled social interactions where each other's understanding was constructed by another who had a better understanding of concepts being learned.

Another significant observation involves students' decreasing attention levels followed by drifting off after getting exposed to excess content over a long period of time. After a few instances, it was noted that it affects their learning capabilities and teaching up to a great extent. Jong, T (2010) argues that learning is hindered when cognitive overload occurs, when working memory capacity is exceeded. Basically, the extraneous cognitive load was increased during a fractions lesson and children started fidgeting and chatting among themselves. Once the basics were explained, enough time was not given for the working memory to process information. Additionally, only one of the subsystems of working memory were utilized and the base idea for explanation used got redundant. Auditory subsystem to explain concepts and repetition for students to retain information got them disinterested.

Assessing cognitive load research has only calculated the impact based on causal factors such as attributes of the task and personal characteristics of the learner. Choi & Merrienboer (2014) argue that physical environment is never considered as a variable affecting cognitive load. Physical environment refers to any setting that can be perceived by human senses and if used innovatively as learning tools, can help improve student learning.

INSIGHTS INTO STUDENT LEARNING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

After placement, I believe teaching and learning is a complex process, wherein, numerous aspects are involved in educating a student. Individual and combination of strategies need to be used to cater to individual needs of students not only based on their backgrounds but also their characteristics. As a result, it is imperative for teachers to move from a single-centered approach to managing issues to a multi-centered approach. Failure to notice the complexity of individual characteristics among group members belonging to the same socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds leads to implementation of ineffective strategies. The latter promotes differentiation to meet specific learning needs of students across a wide range of abilities.

Additionally, students are active learners only capable of a certain level of understanding. Teachers need to detect this level of cognitive development and plan lessons accordingly. Higher level concepts will only get the learner disinterested in important areas of subject matter. I have also realised that children grow up in a political context, unaware of how it might impact them in the future. It is the responsibility of a teacher to ensure his/her students develop skills relevant outside classrooms to deal with such situations.

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