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Tour de Rocky Reflection

EDUC 450

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​ In my two-hour observation of various classes around Rocky Mountain High School, I noticed many great things from the teachers that were beneficial to the students and that I could see myself incorporating into my own teaching practice. I saw that in many classes there was high energy level among the students and staff, and everyone in the classroom seemed to be engaged and happy. I saw this particularly especially evident in the Mind Center homeroom block of time.  Ms. Jones was covering some updates of the handbook with the students, and even though that this could be considered ‘dry material’ I noticed that the students had a good attitude throughout the short lecture.  It was great to see the smiling faces and positivity when covering this topic. In my opinion, the reason for this was that this classroom has a very non-traditional layout. There was a range of seating options from sitting at a desk with a computer, to beanbags, and even some stand-up desks.  Presenting students a variety of seating options is something that I would like to consider in my future as an educator.

​One other strategy I observed that I would like to include into my own teaching practice is the ‘Think-Pair-Share’ technique.  In my past education coursework, I read about this strategy, but it was beneficial to see this put into action.  While observing an intro algebra class, the teacher put this into effect really well.  The class was covering some vocabulary important to understanding algebra, so the instructor asked the students to take a few seconds to think about their own answer, share it with their table partner, then finally share their thinking with the tables around them.  The students followed the directions and seemed to be really engaged in defining the terminology and sharing it to their partners.  I feel that this strategy can be useful when I am teaching various vocabulary or processes to my future classes. I like the idea of students sharing their own findings and teaching each other.

In my time observing Rocky, I saw teachers differentiate their delivery of content in a number of different ways. I witnessed an AP United States History teacher give a lecture to his students. Basically, what he was doing with this lecture was breaking down a text into more simple ideas for his students. Along with the lecture, he was presenting the students with text, photographs, and some graphs to supplement what he was saying. I thought that this was helpful for the students, since they were able to absorb the content in the way that made the most sense to them. The lecture style way of delivering information to students is a newer idea to me. Comparing this to my experiences of teaching at the elementary level, I tend to deliver short pieces of direction chunked up over the class period since the student attention level is much shorter with younger students. It was a different teaching style to observe, and definitely a skill that I would like to practice teaching at the high school level.

I witnessed a lot of positive student-teacher relations in my observations at Rocky. The example that immediately came to my mind came from a Pre-AP English 9 class. The teacher of this course, in my mind, displayed excellent student relations. For this class period, students were asked to work in pairs or a small group to compose sentences using specific vocabulary words on a Google Doc for everyone in the class to see. During this work time, the teacher would travel about the room checking in with students and guiding them along the way. I thought of this to be a good way to quickly see how students were doing in the work process. One other thing that this teacher did to keep positive relations with her students was to say something positive about the sentences they were working on. Since the students were working on a Google Doc with their peers and this was projected on the Smart Board, the teacher could quickly see what they students were writing. I saw that a handful of times that the teacher would peer up at the board and say something positive about their use of vocabulary, sentence structure, or creativity with certain words. I thought she displayed some simple but effective ways of maintaining positive student relationships.

With the time I spent observing a variety of classes at Rocky Mountain High School I was quite impressed with the math classes; I feel that the math program at this school has a lot of benefit to the students. I noticed that there is a varying range in the types of classes and difficulty levels available for students to take. For example, I observed an intro Algebra class that was covering some of the basic terms needed to understand the subject, and then in a Geometry class students were reviewing more advanced concepts for an upcoming exam. I think that this has much benefit to the students at Rocky, since they will be placed into a class that matches their ability levels in math so that they aren’t tossed into a class where they will be completely confused. I appreciate that the goal of the program revolves around students being successful in understanding math, no matter what level they are at. One other thing that I would like to note from my observations comes from Mr. Harding’s Geometry class. When I was in the class observing, he was summarizing some of the things that were going to be covered on the exam, and the behavioral expectations for what happens on test days. I truly appreciated this, because I felt that this was assisting is alleviating some of the students’ stress about taking a math test. I know from personal experiences in math, I tended to become really stressed about taking the test. Mr. Harding reassured the students that they knew the material, since it was what was on the previous homework assignments and what was being discussed in class. He also mentioned how even if a student didn’t perform well on this test, there would be many more opportunities to succeed since it is still early in the semester. Again, I really appreciated Mr. Harding spelling this out to the students because I feel that this helped the students feel more comfortable about what to expect on exam day. Based on these observations, I believe that this class and program poses much benefit to students. Since the math program scaffolds learning for students and the teachers try to make the students feel comfortable about math, I feel that this poses much educational benefit for the students at Rocky Mountain.

In my observations on Thursday, I saw a few different examples of good classroom management. In terms of classroom management, I will reference Mr. Harding’s Geometry class once again. He was setting expectations for what test day should look and sound like. I found this to be important because he stated that there would be a substitute in the class that day. At the high school level, I am sure that students understand that they need to show the same respect for a substitute as they would with their primary instructor, but I thought it was useful and beneficial for Mr. Harding to state this to his students again. This just sets the tone for what should happen when he is gone and reminds the students that the same type of respect needs to be shown to the teacher, no matter who that is. I will keep this in mind in my future as an educator, since there will be at least one or two days per year that I will be absent. Another example of excellent classroom management came from the Pre-AP English 9 class that I observed for a few minutes. I previously stated that this group of students was working in small groups crafting sentences utilizing certain vocabulary terms. There was a lot of chatter and discussion coming from the students, but when the teacher asked for everyone’s attention to clarify something, she was able to gather the attention of everyone in under ten seconds. I found this to be really profound, since valuable class time can be lost by spending large amounts of time attempting to refocus the group’s attention. When I enter my professional career in education, I want to set this expectation with my students quickly. As an art teacher, my students will be working individually or in groups quite often, but I still want to maintain the control of my students so that they know to listen to me when I need to address everyone. In my past coursework, I have read about this technique, but it was valuable to see this happen in real life. This is one of the skills that I want to work on and refine this semester in my teaching practice.

Overall, I was quite impressed from what I saw at Rocky Mountain. I think that the culture in this school is quite positive, and the students and staff are great people. I am very excited to be working here this semester with my corresponding teachers. I feel that my teaching practice will see much benefit from being here this semester. I am quite lucky to be here and very excited to see how the semester unfolds at Rocky!