

STANDARD 1: LEARNING CONTEXT

Community

Anytown, Anystate is located a rural region located at the intersection of two major highways about one hundred miles south of a major metropolitan area. Anytown is home to approximately 10,500 residents. It is a small agricultural community consisting of very few permanent businesses. A department store, a factory, several restaurants, three car dealerships, and the city/county government dominate the job market in the town. Most of the residents commute to neighboring cities for employment. Although the citizens work out of town, they typically attend one of the three large churches which all support very active youth groups. The average salary is approximately \$25,884 and the unemployment rate is over the state average at 6.3%. Due to the limited economic conditions, school bond issues are often denied, even though the district is in need of major building improvements and technology upgrades.

District

The school district has received several accreditations including the A+ Accreditation, Accreditation with Distinction, and the North Central Association Accreditation. The district has clearly shown exemplary educational services for all students. The district's mission is to prepare students for success through commitment to quality teaching and learning. The district's detailed website provides parents with Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) goals and scores, links to assistance websites for families, links to local schools, and the district's mission statement, vision, and the plan describing their goals. The percentage of students scoring proficient on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is 51.7% for Communication Arts and 48.5% for Mathematics. The district has adopted a five year Comprehensive School Improvement Plan that

requires growth in the number of students scoring proficient in Communication Arts and Mathematics to reach 80% by the year 2012. The school district is comprised of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

School

Timewise Elementary is one of the smaller schools with a total of 296 students and 50 staff personnel. The student teacher ratio averages at about 20 students per teacher. Within the small school setting, the administration is able to take an extremely active role with the students. Many of the staff members are able to name a majority of the students attending the school creating personal relationships between the student body and staff. A fairly large amount of collaboration between teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, and administration creates a supportive learning community. The work environment seems to foster a “family-like” atmosphere among all staff and students. The staff is currently focused on implementing Positive Behavior Support (PBS) plans throughout the school with a focus on classroom behavior as well. This system embraces Comer’s principles by teaming up with parents to create and recognize positive behavior experiences for the students. This school-wide discipline plan allows for consistency for the students with little to no differentiation between student expectations from the staff members.

Timewise Elementary is also currently following a comprehensive school improvement plan. The plan was developed by the district and follows state and federal regulations mandating student and school performance. According to the district website the district’s general goal for Timewise Elementary is to ensure that the student is prepared academically, socially, emotionally, and physically for educational transitions. One specific goal is to bring state wide

district scores of at least 50% of the students attending Timewise Elementary into the proficient or advanced range in the areas of communication arts and math. Other goals aim for a decrease in discipline referrals, maintain building attendance and increase attendance at family school events. The district is in the process of creating a district wide common assessment in several subject areas that will be completed by every student in the district. This assessment follows the grade level expectations (GLEs) specified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and provides the district, school, and teacher with immediate feedback that will help educational professionals address areas of weakness within the classroom. The newly adopted reading curriculum and the math investigations curriculum will need to be supplemented to ensure that all grade level expectations are being met.

Classroom

This first grade classroom inspires a positive learning attitude towards learning. The desks are arranged into three rows of six and one row of two. In every row there are two students that are sitting independently while four students are grouped into pairs of two. Higher level students are paired with lower level students. Students with discipline issues are seated independently on the outskirts of the rows so that there is still a feeling of unity and belonging among all of the students within the row therefore addressing Comer's Psychological Developmental Pathway. Students will be able to participate in cooperative learning activities with their shoulder partners or other students in their row which will provide them with opportunities to build the expressive and receptive language skills addressed by Comer's Language Developmental Pathway. The seating arrangement is conducive for the Math investigations program which calls for both collaborative and independent problem solving

activities with the use of a wide variety of manipulatives. These activities incorporate many of Comer's Developmental Pathways but there is a specific focus on Social, Cognitive and Physical. There are many centers around the classroom that allow for a differentiation of learning. The carpet area includes books, calendar, and other group related activities. While the Physical Developmental Pathway is addressed during recess, the carpet area helps the students cope with this pathway throughout the day. Many activities in this area incorporate hand eye coordination, physical movement and discussion of the health aspects of many of life's everyday activities.

Many of the students reside in the same community and so the social dynamics of the classroom tends to follow the neighborhood setup. The "classroom mom" is the PTO president which elevates her classroom involvement to an incredible level. Other parents show their support by sending in requested materials and ensuring that assignments are completed. Classroom rules are located in the front of the room at eye level and follow the school's PBS plan. The three main rules are: be respectful, be responsible, and be ready to learn. Under each rule, explanations are posted that describe how to accomplish these goals. By focusing on the ways to accomplish the rules students are taught the appropriate behavior in a supportive environment ensuring that the Ethical and Psychological Developmental Pathways are addressed. Students are taught morning routines which provide opportunities for responsibility as the students unpack backpacks, turn in homework, move lunch cards, and complete morning work.

The cooperative teacher enjoys creating a loving and motivating atmosphere for the students to learn. She has been certified and employed as an elementary educator for twelve years. This is her fourth year at Timewise Elementary spanning her twelve year career. She is a positive teacher who enjoys encouraging her students and all of those around her with her words

and actions. Her values are evident in the techniques she employs when modeling constructive behavior with her students. She is extremely knowledgeable in her field while retaining a high commitment and motivation level to continuously learn more. The teacher often incorporates songs, rhymes, and storybook characters into many of her lessons requiring that she is active and in front of the classroom for extended periods of time. It is evident in all that she does that she thoroughly enjoys working with students. This enthusiasm is reflected in the classroom atmosphere which in turn is motivating and sincere.

The classroom is colorful and clutter free. There is an extremely organized and welcoming feel to the classroom which seems to positively affect student attitude as well as the attitudes of visitors to the room. The curtains and windows are often closed preventing students from being distracted by activities outside; however, it also seems to create a darker and sometimes slightly stuffy feeling in the classroom. The decorations in the room are not only informative but somewhat comforting to the students. While there is not a smart board located in the classroom, there is a television connected to the computer allowing for Internet resources to be shared with the students as a class. Smart boards are available in the Library and Computer Lab. There is also a laptop connected to the Internet with bookmarked websites for student use and a projector is located at the front of the classroom.

Classroom visitors include administration, reading and math recovery teachers, and various workshop instructors. Several students are pulled out throughout the morning for various interventions. One student is pulled out for English Language Learner (ELL) services and two students meet with the special reading paraprofessionals. The Reading Recovery teacher pulls six students out for additional reading assistance. The specials teacher pulls two students out of the class once a week for additional intervention. Two students are alternately pulled by the speech

teacher twice a week. Five students are being pulled by more than one teacher for these intervention sessions. The sheer number of student pullouts during the extremely essential reading/writing/spelling workshop time means that there are many missed assignments and repetitive instruction sessions that need to occur. The ELL student receives services from four of these special area teachers. Specials are conveniently situated twenty minutes after recess which allows for a great cool down/story session. There are ten students reading on level, five students are above level and four students are below level. Many of the students possess a positive learning attitude.

The first grade room contains nineteen extremely motivated students. The class size continuously fluctuates as students transfer in and out due to their parent's military career. There are several students with late birthdays and one student was retained in Kindergarten due to behavioral issues. Approximately half of the students in the class have attended Timewise Elementary since Kindergarten. The class is composed of five boys and fourteen girls. Of the nineteen students in the room, six students receive free lunch and three students receive reduced lunch. There are four Hispanic American students, four African American students, and eleven Caucasian American students. Two students speak English as a second language and two students have Spanish spoken at home as the main language. There are currently no students with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or a Programmatic Behavior Plan (PBP) in the class. Eleven parents visited the teacher on the Meet-the-Teacher night. Fourteen students consistently complete homework activities. The class make-up seems to incorporate all of the learning styles. Many of the students are a combination of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, verbal, musical and interpersonal learners. There are at least three students that appear to be intrapersonal learners. There are six above-level learners in math and reading. One of these learners struggles in math

although they excel in reading, writing and spelling. The group of average-level learners includes eight students and the below-level learners include five students. Two students pose serious behavior issues and are from the above-level learner group. On a whole, it is evident that the class is intensely motivated to learn.

Developing lesson plans will need to consider the classroom factors and characteristics of the students in this class. The high motivation level to learn will make motivating the students throughout the lessons inspiring and fun. Diversifying the lesson to ensure that the students meet the desired mastery level of the lessons is where the challenge lies. Studies have shown that “when teachers impart knowledge with little attention to how a learner acquires that knowledge, students soon become nonparticipants in the academic life of the classroom” (Vacca & Vacca, 2008, p. 9). Taking this into consideration, students will be strategically seated ensuring that shoulder partners will interact and benefit from each other. There will be a large amount of pair sharing and shoulder partner discussions taking place so that the entire class involvement level is at 100%. Questions addressed to the class will be answered using these techniques rather than just sampling the class where the involvement level is lower. Activating prior knowledge will be the start of every lesson so that the students are able to connect the new knowledge with the old.

Addressing the multiple intelligences and Comer’s Developmental Pathways will be a must if the class and the lesson are to be successful in their goals. The varied intelligences will require that the lessons have a variety of components. Students will be physically moving around the room either in a whole group setting or in smaller cooperative learning groups addressing the kinesthetic learner’s needs as well as addressing several of Comer’s Developmental pathways. Many lessons will incorporate a supplemental language based curriculum by incorporating stories read aloud, in partners and independently. This will address the needs of the

intrapersonal, interpersonal, visual, and auditory learners. The classroom will be incorporating the outdoors by the creation of a poetry window. Many lessons will also include an element of the outdoors and nature so that the naturalist learner's needs are addressed. Students will be required to problem solve rather than be told the solution so that their Cognitive Developmental Pathway is addressed and the logical thinker's needs are addressed as well. The existential learner will benefit from many of the questions posed to the class that will require deep thought prior to, during, and after the lesson. The teacher and the students are a team and the lessons will require that the students' needs and characteristics guide the development and implementation of the lessons.