

## TEACHER WORK SAMPLE

### **INTRO:**

It wasn't until our ED604 class required us to read Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* that I actually stopped to think about my family's influence and background as it impacts my view on education, my experience as a learner, and above all else, why I interact with students in the way that I do. For some reason, I simply operated under a naturally naive assumption that I just "was how I was, and liked what I liked," taking little time to reflect or consider how this information may benefit me as an educator. However, once I took the time to think the entire process through, I realized that my life and educational experiences are the basis for my style as an educator.

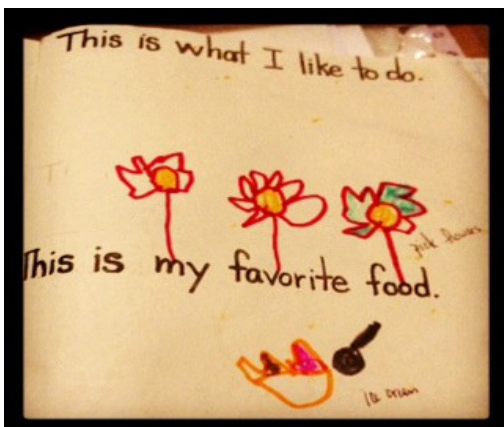
Even from the young age of five, I remember being drilled with vocabulary words and basic addition/subtraction flashcards on a daily basis, learning cursive hand-writing as a "reward" for doing well on a test in class, and even consequently, being reprimanded for an A- on an assigned project. Like many strict parents, often lightheartedly referred to as "Chinese Mothers" in the book, my mother and father saw education as the absolute only solution to break the cycle of poverty and to live a successful life—a perspective that makes a lot of sense given their backgrounds.

My mother grew up in an incredibly poor, farming family of immigrants and left high school at the age of 17 (only to later get her GED). My father came from a Native American family of 12, also living far below the poverty level, that grew crops in a town around a reservation in southern Canada. Both of my parents were first generation high school graduates and eventually first-generation college graduates. Because of this, failure in any aspect of school simply wasn't an option for their children. They both saw education as the top priority in life. And it's absolutely the direct result of their experience and consequently their pressure to excel in school that I love learning and educating to the extent that I do today. Like many children with parents similar to mine, it is their drive to succeed and their stance on the importance of education, that has shaped my foundation as a lifelong learner.

That being said, I'll let you in on a huge secret...learning has never come quickly nor easily for me. What takes most people 20 minutes to complete, takes me about double that time. I need to attempt things multiple times in multiple different ways to really understand what I'm doing. For me, directions literally make no sense unless explained repeatedly using examples, and sitting still in a college lecture that lasts more than 10 minutes is literally hell. Even as an adult, I'm often asked by professors to sit still in class and get "redirected" when distracted during presentations and speeches. My experience as a learner is textbook ADD/ADHD.

What this mean big-picture is that the ways I learn best are a bit different than most people--- and the more traditional talk and teach style used in classrooms doesn't cut it for me. I cannot understand something unless I physically keep moving, create something or learn through experience. And just as my parent's pressure shaped my view on education and how I teach material to students, my own struggles to comprehend material, stay still in class and participate, and to understand how to proceed on projects/tests/assignments, has forever altered my philosophy towards learning, approach to teaching and level of empathy with students.

Without a doubt, these two influences shaped me into the high-energy and highly empathic educator that I am today. My patience is endless and classroom behavior issues that generally frustrate others pass me by unnoticed. Balancing multiple activities at a time and engaging students in hands-on creative lessons comes both easily and naturally. And I'm thankful to say that, it's through my own challenges and experiences, that I've grown into the student teacher that I am today.



**What I *actually* thought about as a student. "Picking flowers is what I like to do and my favorite food is ice cream."**

## **PHASE 1: PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR STUDENT LEARNING**



PS. 19- The Curtis School  
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When told to preference schools for my Spring 2013 student teaching assignment, I only asked to be placed in a school where I could be most useful as a resource of time and energy--- ideally a school with a high level of students from a lower-socioeconomic background. Though my parents were self-made successes, the schools I attended until they reached that level were often lacking in resources, unsafe, crowded and composed of a student body all from families living far below the poverty level. To many, schools like this were considered a disaster or failure. However, the thing I did regularly notice about these schools as a child, was that they often had the best of the best when it came to teachers and classroom management. (I recognize that research has shown that this generally isn't the case, however that was my experience as a student). Many of the lower achieving schools I attended, over time, had acquired staffs that were so incredibly passionate (and strict) about bettering the lives of students who otherwise statistically may not even finish high school. Being in a setting like this, amongst a group of educators who aren't complacent or "burnt-out," seemed like an absolute honor and a chance to give back in a way that many educators gave to me.

On top of that, I know that my naturally happy and positive demeanor is something that may be a bit refreshing for teachers who are exhausted from constantly trying to bridge the achievement gap, and that these schools were more likely to NEED the additional classroom support of a student teacher.

Luckily, I was absolutely right. The elementary school that I was placed in for student teaching (PS 19- The Curtis School) is everything I love embodied in one school. The student population consists of lower-income students, many of which are children of recent South American or African immigrants. The school is (my opinion) relatively understaffed and not adequately full of resources, and has a questionable reputation

according to many on Staten Island. However, everything the school lacks in monetary resources is MORE than compensated for in skill and love from the teachers and staff---something that is evident through the tight-knit community of the school.

But before I delve even deeper into my actual classroom experience, there were a few steps I took to prepare for student teaching that were beneficial and worth mentioning. First, I knew that researching my school and understanding just what I was getting into, required me to research the school's history, background, student demographics, and to gather other useful information so that I could be as effective as possible during my time there. When reviewing the school's website, I first noticed that the phrase "Striving for Excellence- Entrusted with Tomorrow's Leaders" was written all over the place. This seemed to be a positive message that I felt coincided with my own personal commitment to high standards for all students. I next looked at the mission statement of the school because it seemed to be a beneficial guide to understanding what the principal, staff and faculty hoped to provide to students and families.

### **PS. 19 Mission Statement:**

"It is our mission to ensure that all of P.S. 19's students receive a high quality well-rounded education that will serve as a solid foundation for future success. We will provide tools to enable our students to perform problems, think creatively, plan, meet high standards, and be technologically literate. We are a diverse, collaborative community dedicated to achieving high standards of academic excellence for all our students. Through high quality, standards driven instruction, and a nurturing environment, we will create a community of life-long learners."

### **PS.19's Mascot**

Though I'm the first to admit that summaries that don't actually represent or a few key words and phrases stood out in intentions. Specifically, providing students like the school's belief, I'm naturally inclined teaches students more about how to succeed could. Finding a balance between providing on! In addition, creating a community I'm completely dedicated to high



view, children are humans that need to be can even begin trying to force academic elementary school, this basic need is the self-esteem, self-confidence and self-academic strength for these children. management and "showing students who is boss" I have a deeply rooted belief that the answer is absolutely always to love them more and give more. Though this may be taking the mission statement into my own interpretation, it quickly helped me connect with the goals of administration at PS. 19. All of this feeds into my personal philosophy that the only way to break the cycle of socioeconomic imprisonment and poverty is through the use of education. For this reason, students in schools like PS. 19 need even more attention, support and love than your average, middle-class American student.

mission statements are often just silly embody how the school functions in reality, this one and meshed well with my own with well-rounded education was key. Much to believe that the school and classroom in life than any textbook alone ever possibly career, life, academic and social skills is spot through a nurturing environment also hit home. standards and high achievement, but in my loved, respected and cared for BEFORE we success. Especially when working in an something that I see as key in establishing motivation that will serve as a basis for While many favor strict behavior

management and "showing students who is boss" I have a deeply rooted belief that the answer is absolutely always to love them more and give more. Though this may be taking the mission statement into my own interpretation, it quickly helped me connect with the goals of administration at PS. 19. All of this feeds into my personal philosophy that the only way to break the cycle of socioeconomic imprisonment and poverty is through the use of education. For this reason, students in schools like PS. 19 need even more attention, support and love than your average, middle-class American student.

### **Demographics:**

Though I live near PS. 19 and already felt aware of the demographics of the student population, using actual statistics as a guide seemed like a wise way to gain insight as to the little learners I'd be working with. On the school's website, they self-describe as a culturally diverse student body with a high Hispanic population and a Title One status. This further reiterated what I was already expecting. Knowing that the school is Title One gave me more of a clue as to just how low-income most of the students' families actually are.

The next thing that stood out while I was perusing the school website was the number of services provided to parents, especially the adult ELL classes and adult classes geared towards better parenting and self-improvement. To me this indicates that the school is deeply invested in the student's entire family and recognized the importance of improving home-life while improving school-life.

I also found out that this public, elementary school consists of 640 students and 39 teachers, offers

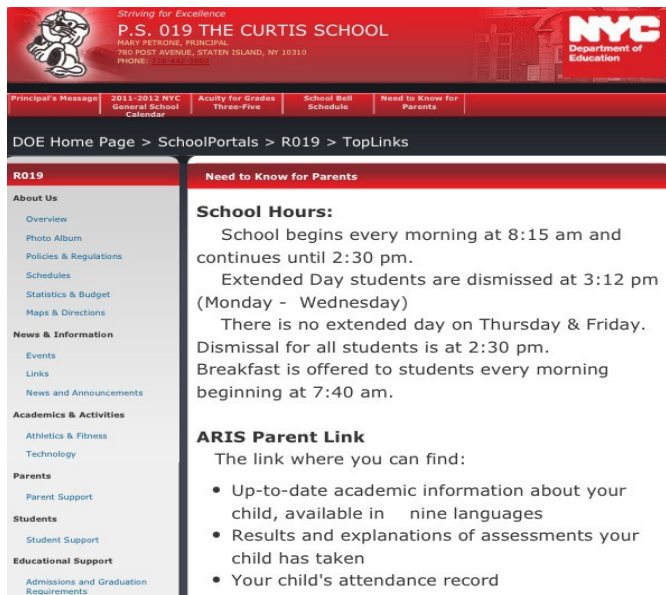
classes from pre-K to grade 5 and received a B on the 2012 Progress Report (which I found impressive!). The school also has a 94% attendance rate (also highly impressive to me!) and all of our students receive free lunches daily (and can receive free breakfast, free after school snacks and free dinner by participating in additional education programs).

### Students at PS 19 by Gender

Female	300	46.5 %
Male	345	53.5 %

### Students at PS 19 Race Demographics

Indian	5	.8%
Asian	42	6.5 %
Hispanic	358	55.5 %
Black	128	19.8 %
White	112	17.4 %



One final thing that I found highly impressive about the school's website was the commitment to using both technology and more traditional means of communication with parents. Though many of the student's families say they do not have access to technology, it seemed that the school was progressive and dedicated to still using its website as a way to regularly get information out to parents. For example, via the website, parents can actually look at their own child's attendance records and certain parts of their portfolio's online. Since students need experience using computers and technology, I think that this says a lot about how hard the school will be pushing students/families to find a way to gain access to the internet regularly. In addition, I was happily surprised to see that everything found in English regarding the school can just as easily be found translated into Spanish to accommodate the student population.

**This screenshot demonstrates how clearly the school is trying to communicate with parents (by being so specific with the schedule) as well as the easy accessibility to important student information all online.**

### Preparing for Student Learning Experiences

Before my first day student teaching, there were two other things I wanted to do aside from researching the school. First and foremost, I wanted to go to the school and meet my teachers/do a tour/check out the area surrounds the school. Secondly, I wanted to make sure I began the semester "on top of" all my planning and organization.

When I went to the school, the first thing I noticed was that the housing and area surrounding the school was a bit rundown and had a relatively unsafe vibe (closed down stores, broken down cars parked randomly along the road, kids running in the street and litter around the school). Honestly, although this was not the ideal environment surrounding a school, it was definitely not as questionable as reviews about the school made it seem. Once I was in the building, I realized that the school is separated into floors/grades that function closely with one another (and not that well as a whole). In addition, I noticed that there's no librarian and

limited access to technology. All of this gave me some insight as to what I'd experience once I was actually a part of the school's community.

### **My First Placement**

After a few days in my first placement, PS. 19, the school already felt like home. I realized that it doesn't matter if you choose to visit on a Monday or Friday, early morning or late afternoon--- the experience is almost always the same. As soon as you first walk through the door of the school, there's an immediate rush of positive energy--signs of community and closeness everywhere you turn. Even now, while the weather is still occasionally a bit nasty and cold, there's an undeniable warmth you feel upon seeing all of the smiling faces (students, parents and teachers alike!) that greet you in passing-- stopping to say hello or asking if they can help direct you in some way.



**Hallway Mural on the Second Floor**

And it's quite genuine. The deeper into the elementary school you get, the more real this bubble of happiness seems. Teachers scurry from room to room, laughing and teasing one another. Students giggle as they run towards their classrooms to beat the bell, often stopping to wave hello to an unknown stranger. The halls are immaculate aside from the student's artwork and writing that decorate the walls. In an area of Staten Island known for its lower socioeconomic background, this school is a well-developed gem dedicated to changing the lives of its students. It's *really* an incredibly inspiring place to be.

In regards to specific classroom assignments, I was above fortunate. The cooperating teacher I was assigned to during my first placement, Mrs. Panepinto, was well-known throughout the school for her incredible leadership and classroom management skills. This worked in my benefit because classroom management tends to be the area where I have historically struggled the most. Not only that, but Mrs. Panepinto also had a reputation for being a bit of an alpha female who refused to settle for anything but the best from her students and those around her.

And live up to her reputation she did! Even from the very first day we met, Mrs. Panepinto and I had an incredible bond. Our temperaments naturally complimented one another, and she was eager to have additional help in her general education classroom where she is usually the only adult at all times. We discussed rules, boundaries, routine in the classroom, expectations, requirements, concerns, communication preferences--- everything. In addition, she was a great resource because she was relatively new to the teaching field (she's only been a teacher for the last 11 years) and had a history working in public relations/business prior to this position (I also worked in public relations/politics before becoming involved in education--- so this enhanced our relationship). This woman was a blessing in disguise and honestly taught me how to step up my disciplinarian game in the classroom.

### **Classroom Set-Up**



My first placement was a general education 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class. It's one of the four 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes in the school. The classroom itself was a colorful storm of chaos. Student work lined all of the walls and vibrant colors and light were everywhere. Things were a bit crowded, but everything seemed to have a place and a purpose. What I loved most were the pictures of students celebrating holidays as a class, working on projects and simply enjoying life. In addition, on the walls were student-written rules and expectations and student artwork. It was clear that these kids took pride in the classroom and really made it their own.

There was also tons of supportive resources and materials throughout the classroom including a fun library full of books and a reading corner. Though at first a bit overwhelming, it soon became

apparent that there was a "method" to Mrs. Panepinto's "madness." I eventually realized that each subject had its own area in the room. Much to my surprise, I also eventually became desensitized to all of the distractions in the room and stopped noticing them over the course of the semester (for better or worse!).

There were many positive and negative things that I noted about my classroom environment, and they are best shared in list form because there's so much to mention.

## Welcome to Room 320!

**Positive Things About My Classroom Environment:** Tons of books available for the students to use, regularly available school supplies because many of the students cannot afford them, students are grouped in a seating style that emphasizes partner/teamwork, students are grouped together based on skill levels which makes differentiating even more possible and easy, technology is used in our classroom on a regular basis and the Smartboard is one of our biggest assets, the document camera is used daily, the bright decorations appeal to students and excite them, students are regularly allowed to use computers to do work (which is also beneficial because many say that they don't have access at home), we have a carpet space for group interaction and modeled instruction (I enjoy this particularly because my students love getting out of their seats and moving around), there are tons of daily activities required (adjusting the day of school, the calendar, attendance, "money" to represent the day") which give the students a sense of both independence and responsibility (they seem to really love being assigned weekly roles and being held accountable), the bell schedule and classroom gameplan is clearly posted and discussed every single day, the daily routine RARELY changes and provides consistency, the classroom itself is located on the top floor of the building and is at the end of the hallway (so it's removed from most distractions) and lastly, the room has amazing natural light which helps keep all of our students awake and happy!

**Negative Things About My Classroom Environment:** Though the variety of resources is great it can sometimes be distracting, grouping low-performers with other low-performers means that sometimes entire TABLES are staring off into space until they have more individualized instruction, the grouping is not useful for conferencing as it often distracts an entire table, classroom space is so small that at times we are literally all on top of one another, the school does not take advantage of its computers or library (now that they fired the librarian especially), and lastly, there is major overuse of "bathroom" privileges and "nurse visits" in my classroom.

### The Students

One of the most amazing things about my classroom and experience was that even from the start all 23 of my third grade students were wonderful.

They craved attention so badly, and having an extra person in the room meant a lot to them. From day one, they constantly showered me with homemade gifts, asked nonstop questions, tried to work with me individually and literally hung on my every word. We quickly developed a strong rapport and great relationship. Because of Mrs. Panepinto's already established classroom management routine, I had space to be myself and be a bit on the nurturing "good cop" side. This also allowed me to communicate clearly with them and voice my boundaries and expectations proactively, instead of through discipline only.



## Welcome to Room 320!

If I had to describe my students ability levels or performance challenges, I'd say that the majority of the students were VERY high energy and would most likely be considered behavioral issues/would have an IEP at a different school. However, since about two-thirds behaved in this way, the classroom routine just needed to be adjusted accordingly in order to be successful. The classroom environment constantly needed to function at a very fast-pace in order to keep any of the students engaged. In addition, with these students in particular, any classroom outbursts and behavioral issues needed to be handled IMMEDIATELY in order to deter others from reacting and acting out (or else things would sometimes have the domino effect). In this class in particular, most of my students were actually African immigrants (which is not a completely accurate depiction of the school demographic breakdown) and most of their parents didn't speak English very well. A handful of students had actual IEP's, some for vision problems, others for learning disabilities (like ADD)



### Welcome to Room 320!

and one for dyslexia. As expected, we had a variety of different learners, as all classrooms do (hands-on, visual, audio, tactual, kinesthetic) which lent itself well to differentiating.

The community in the classroom was really strong and the children were very familiar with one another and sensitive to each others emotions. For example, when one student was upset and crying, tons of other students would comfort them, rush over with tissues, or even cry as well. I also noticed that the students were specifically adept at reading the moods and emotions of Mrs. Panepinto and me and behaving accordingly. Without a word being spoken, they generally knew which days were not good days to be silly and hyped up. Their emotional intelligence consistently surprised and impressed me over the semester.



### Welcome to Room 320!

### Other Teachers & Staff

During my first placement, I also become particularly close to the other third grade teachers and staff that I interacted with on a regular basis. In particular, I'm now close with two third grade female teachers who have both been at the school for 10+ years. While getting to know these other women (and to know Mrs. Panepinto better) I learned that the close bond they shared in their grade was actually an anomaly in the school and that most grades were not this incredibly bonded. Through our daily conversations, I was able to get new perspectives from these women on the biggest challenges they feel they face as educators and advice they'd give to someone new coming into the field.

What interested me about these women was that they were all white and have expressed to me a certain level of frustration connecting to minority students because they feel that a barrier exists even prior to getting to know them. These teachers came from affluent backgrounds and were drawn to PS. 19 for the same reasons I was interested, but then found it hard to connect and felt resistance. It brought up questions for me that I hadn't previously taken into consideration.

The teachers I got to know were amongst the most dedicated and driven that I've ever encountered. They are



passionate about teaching and frustrated with students' parents and how administration at the school function. Their techniques for running the classroom are all relatively similar and they work well collectively to keep all students performing at high levels. They also built a strong support structure and community amongst the grade and share literally every important worksheet or activity that they stumble upon. We also had coffee before school and ate lunch together daily, which served as a great way to plan and vent. I found this close relationship to be the biggest benefit in my experience student teaching because they literally provided a source of "family" for me during the experience. Through the close relationship that these women shared with the assistant principal, Mrs. Geli, I was also able to get to know multiple members of administration on a deeper level than expected.

### **Homemade Valentine's created for my students, cooperating teacher and fellow third-grade teachers!**

#### **Family Role in School Involvement**

It was surprising to me when I discovered that our class was split pretty evenly regarding the amount of involvement each student's family had with their education and the school overall. The parents in my class basically fell into one end of the spectrum of the other- it was not what you'd expect. There are those family's who literally have no involvement in their children's school lives and are annoyed when we call and ask for support/to discuss their child and openly say so. For example, when we had parent teacher conferences with students who were still at risk for being held back, literally zero out of 15 parents showed (after they specifically chose their meeting time and confirmed the appointment).

Then on the other end of the spectrum, we have those parents who would love to do more but have multiple children, are raising their children alone, work way too many hours to truly develop their students learning, or don't speak English and therefore cannot help with class work. There are also about 2 or 3 families in my class who consistently check their child's homework and work with them on school stuff or are actively involved in the school through the PTA or some other organization.

#### **Volunteers, Special Programs and Other Initiatives**

The school offers a variety of different, special programs that allow volunteers to offer their support to students and also programs that are meant to enrich the student's experiences. Some examples of these programs include: extended day (where students stay for an additional hour after school on Mondays and Tuesday for classroom style support), LEAP program (a program geared towards younger students who are struggling), English Immersion Classrooms (which offer classes taught in English one day and Spanish the next), and day school for parents to teach them English. In addition, we have programs for those who are excelling in classes and need additional enrichment, such as Math Academy (a fun, challenging after-school math program). Finally, we have specific programs geared towards ELA & MATH testing preparation, reading volunteers who come in weekly to work with struggling students, pull out services for those needing speech therapy and daily school counseling.

#### **Preparation of Teachers**

I was floored when I discovered the amount of time that my cooperating teacher spends preparing for classes and further training herself as an educator. Although she's not specifically skilled with differentiating or experienced with special education, she's highly intentional about putting in the effort and learning how to work with students of all ability levels. In addition, Mrs. Panepinto comes into school about an hour and a half early every single day to prepare for the day and stays for about an hour and a half after school each day. During our lunches she even met with other teachers to discuss ways to improve the classroom or reach students who weren't understanding the lessons. I found her to also be very flexible at adapting to the needs of students, very willing to backtrack to catch her students up when they aren't "getting it" and highly willing to take on leadership roles. Lastly, she often attended and led professional development opportunities-- always jumping at the chance for personal growth.

#### **Areas the School is Focusing On-challenges**

PS. 19 is making strides in all areas and regularly self-evaluating to see where improvement is necessary. The top areas that I found the school was focusing on improving were attendance, test prep,



community involvement and parent involvement. My classroom teacher supported these goals, and placed an even higher emphasis on test prep than most of the educators I was around. It was clear that by March, test preparation for standardized exams becomes a key part of all classrooms from third grade on.

### **Academic and Behavioral Expectations**

Both PS. 19 and Mrs. Panepinto have high expectations and standards for student success and achievement. While Mrs. Panepinto was in agreement about school standards, she also had a list of personal goals for students to achieve throughout the year in order to be successful in life and prepared to move on to the fourth grade. She was constantly reassessing whether or not these standards could be raised and new ways to enhance student learning. While students were aware of these expectations, I don't think it created a pressure that the students experience.

### **Role of the Community in the Life of the School**

Involvement with the local community is a key part of PS. 19's mission. The students come from close-knit families and communities and because many of them are tied by being ELL's, they have a definite drive to support the community and help those they see less fortunate than themselves. I noticed that these students rarely express any sense of entitlement, and also seem more group-based or community-based than other students I've worked with at different schools. One example of the students love for their community can be shown through the STUDENT planned and created food-drive that my third grade class came up with. Working together they planned the food drive, created posters and fliers, presented their plan to all of the classes in the school, distributed boxes and then collected non-perishable foods. The result was beautiful and the students were proud to give back to their community.



**Some of the collections from the student-run food drive.**

### **Needs of Students & Families in an Inclusive Setting**

Although my classroom was a general education setting, the students were obviously performing at different levels and worked best using different learning styles and in an inclusive classroom setting. Over time we incorporated much more differentiation than when I initially arrived, mainly because my teaching style focused on different approaches than Mrs. Panepinto's and the changes happened naturally. Some example that I noticed from the beginning were different lists of sorting words for the week, homework that allows the students to create something/write about something/free choice to allow everyone to use their strengths as a student. By the end of my time in her classroom, we regularly allowed different tables to work on completely different tasks at the same time although learning the same material. We also used technology and hands-on learning more. Mrs. Panepinto made it her focus all year to keep in close communication with the families of students who were somehow struggling in the classroom or needed some kind of additional support.

### **Curriculum, Techniques & Teaching Strategies**

The main thing that I noticed about the curriculum, techniques and teaching strategy in PS. 19 were that the entire school follows the reading and writing workshop model. This means that they break all of their periods for classes 1-5 into Math Workshop, Reading Workshop, Writing Workshop. In addition, they strictly follow the Teacher's College of Columbia layout and use only materials and articles from there. For math, the school follows the Everyday Math program model. However, both of these programs are being faded out after the school has found the techniques ineffective for the student population. Next year the school is switching to Go Math and another completely different style reading/writing program that has test prep basically built into the program organically.

Something I loved about the school's curriculum that is in line with my own focus, is that there is a major push to keep the curriculum multicultural. This involves making learning applicable and relatable to the students we're working with. This doesn't only mean using examples that could actually happen in regular everyday life, but also using examples and texts that are both diverse and applicable. For example, if the books we are reading only have white children in them, or are about life on a farm, the students cannot relate that well and don't get as involved. Having materials that are accurate reflections of our classroom population sparks the students interests. We also use a large number of texts that feature words in Spanish or even entire texts in

Spanish.

These are both techniques that can be used in collaboration with my own personal thoughts about best teaching strategies and techniques. Some techniques and strategies that I generally naturally incorporate are hands-on learning and learning through doing. I like to follow a strict routine and keep the classroom moving at a fast-pace in order to keep everyone engaged. Often, if the classroom energy seems low, I'll have the students stand at their seats and do jumping-jacks or run in place to get moving again.

Another technique I love incorporating is the multisensory approach to teaching. Like myself, many of the students best remember something when they see, hear and touch something. The use of fun anecdotes also works well. Finally, I like to use teaching activities that empower my students to take charge of their own learning and to ask questions. Even when they correct or question me, I highly encourage it as I like to know that they recognize the role that they play in their own education.

One thing I was surprised to find is how rarely actual lesson plans are created and how little pre-creating of materials goes into lesson plans. Since there's only about 35 minutes to teach entire lessons, in reality they cannot happen as we were taught to prepare them at college.

### **Additional Factors**

There were a few other things I noticed about the school during my first placement that I was not necessarily in tune to immediately upon my arrival. One is that there is a lot of teacher frustration with both how the union is operated and a lot of frustration with how the principal makes decisions and treats the teachers. It's actually the only negative thing I ever heard about during my entire first placement. The other thing is that the teachers are all very loyal to one another and will cover up tardiness or help one another out in almost any situation. There is a strong bond amongst my grade partners. Lastly, I noticed what a huge impact testing has on the stress levels of the teachers and on the focus within the classroom. By March, the entire classroom routine had changed completely to primarily test prep.

### **My Focus Student**

From the very beginning of my student teaching experience, there was one student who stood out to me more than any of the other students in my third grade classroom. It was clear that he needed lots of extra support, attention and love and was also performing at a level lower than all of his peers (in a class with general low-performance). This student, who I eventually learned is named Starkel is a black, 8-year-old student with immigrant parents who recently moved to the United States from Africa. When I mentioned this student to my cooperating teacher, she told me that not only was Starkel on the "potential hold over" list (meaning that he's at risk of repeating the grade), but that he's one student she finds it particularly hard to connect with and remain patient with while working together.

To many, Starkel is the perfect picture of a "problem child." He is not engaged in the classroom, he scored a 1 on the predictive standardized tests for both math and language arts, regularly disrupts class by picking fights, slamming things around and crying and is also extremely stand-offish and aggressive towards staff. I eventually learned that he's a student notorious for his behavior, who comes from a large family of 8 children (all boys) and has parents who work full-time but are still financially struggling.

He has both hygiene and behavioral problems in addition to his academic challenges, and regularly became disengaged or became disruptive versus class. Each day he arrives to school wearing the exact same outfit and once came in unknowingly with a cockroach in his bookbag. Without being told, it's evident that Starkel is highly neglected at home. And for this reason mostly, he became the student I found myself naturally drawn to and conferencing with the most.

Once I got to know Starkel better, and had the chance to learn about him through personal information he revealed through work that demonstrates his personal narrative and life story, I discovered that he receives little attention at home, is often hungry when he comes in to school and generally only receives meals at PS. 19. His history as a student is that he regularly fails to do homework, has parents who openly express that they believe the school is fully responsible for his academics, is highly intelligent and yet somehow failing every single subject (including art/gym/etc).

In my frameworks I shared my goals for Starkel which varied but primarily included: preventing this student from repeating the third grade, improving his fluency while reading, giving him long term study skills to use for the rest of his life, helping him connect socially with peers, adjusting his behavior problems (mainly violence) and getting him engaged in the classroom. From an early point in the semester, I determined that using a multicultural curriculum, serving as one of the few constants in Starkel's life, and holding him responsible to strict rules and expectations brought out the best in him. For this reason, I've chosen to include

four lesson plans from my teaching that I personally enjoyed doing but that also appealed to Starkel and gave me insight as to how he thinks or somehow interested him to a higher extent than normal.