

Journal Entry - Week 1

At the beginning of my Practicum at the Hellenic American college of Athens I was both anxious and excited to be there. The first day, I met my mentor, Ms. Vasiliki Tsoumani, who was very welcoming from the beginning and willing to answer all my questions. She explained to me everything that I needed to know before entering any class, from the arrangement of the classrooms to the material making. Ms. Tsoumani also mentioned that it was her first time after almost ten years to become a mentor, and thus she was interested to know more about the Practice Teaching experience through the eyes of a university student.

During the first week, my mentor showed me around the entire school. The school was a private elementary school, thus I was quite impressed by the facilities provided to the students. As being myself a student of public schools, I was quite stunned to encounter such great facilities, like a big library, a swimming pool, a cafeteria, etc. I was also shown the classrooms, which were circle shaped with individual desks that were arranged in a way that all students could look at each other during the lessons, and big windows, so the classrooms were always bright from the light that came from outside. All classrooms were equipped with a computer, an interactive white board and big bookcases in which students stored their textbooks, readers, and folders.

The school had a separate English department and the English teachers were more than fifteen. My mentor taught all grades, except the 5th grade. During that week, I entered all my mentor's classes, except the 1st grade. The first time that I entered each grade, my mentor introduced me to the students, and she told them that I would be there for quite some time to observe their performance in class, and to help her during the lessons. Something that made a great impression was that all grades were taught exclusively in English, and no Greek was allowed throughout the class. Even when students talked to the teacher in Greek, she would respond in English. In addition, my mentor showed me the textbooks, which were not the ones used in the public schools, but they were textbooks published by the Oxford University. Along with the textbooks, my mentor always provided her own vocabulary and grammar material for each class, which were also explained exclusively in English.

After the first week of observation, I was very excited to go back the next week, and I thought to myself that this would be a unique experience, that I should definitely take advantage of.

Journal Entry - Week 2

On the second week of my Practice teaching at the Hellenic American college, I started to focus more on the way that the lessons took place, and the behavior of both the teacher and the students during the teaching hours.

As it was my second week there, students started to get used to me and became more friendly. During this week, I observed all my mentor's classes, except the 1st grade. As I started to feel

more comfortable around the students and my mentor, I didn't hesitate to ask her to let me do things in class, such as draw something for the students on the board, help her give out their folders or help students who had learning difficulties.

During the lessons that took place in the 2nd grade, I observed that the classes were based on repetition, meaning that all students read the same text in class, copied the dialogues of the text in their notebooks, and listened to audios that repeated the vocabulary that was used in text. In terms of classroom management, the teacher, due to the children's young age, was more lenient. At the beginning or towards the end of the lesson, she would let students share something they wanted, even if it was irrelevant to the subject. When a student did something without permission (e.g., eat in class), she wouldn't shout at them but instead she would ask them if they thought that what they did in class was right after the bell had rung.

During my second week, 3rd grade was given a project, for which each student had to pick a book they liked from the school library, read it, and then present it in class. The presentation of the book, was on the students' choice. For example, it could be a PowerPoint presentation or a summary of the book, written by the students. After the time for the presentations had passed, students did vocabulary activities individually and were allowed to share examples using the new vocabulary discussed. After the activities, students were given homework on that vocabulary. If students reacted negatively to the homework given, the teacher wouldn't respond.

Grade 4 also focused on vocabulary. Students learnt new vocabulary by observing pictures, listened to the word that each picture showed, and then repeated the words. After that, they discussed all the words in class, gave brief definitions, and made up sentences consisting the new words learnt. Towards the end of the lessons, students did activities with the new vocabulary for practice.

Finally, 6th grade focused on literature, and more specifically the book "Because of Winn-Dixie". Students read each chapter of the book out loud in class, and after reading, students were asked to give feedback and their opinion on the plot. Also, students were allowed to share their experiences that might come up from the plot of the story. If there was someone being talkative while the reading took place in class, the teacher would move close to them or she would ask them if they wanted to go out for a walk for a couple of minutes, and come back again when they felt better.

Journal Entry - Week 3

On the third and last week of observation, I was definitely less anxious than I was during the first week. Students got used to my presence in the classroom and they felt comfortable to greet me, talk to me or ask for help during the lessons.

Due to a field trip and a school play, I got to meet my mentor's first graders during the third week. The lesson that took place in the first grade seemed to me completely different in comparison to the other grades. As I was informed later by my mentor, because of the students' young age, the first grade focused on the communicative aspect of learning. Throughout the entire school year, first graders were only taught the alphabet and speaking pattern drills that the students repeated after the teacher. Every lesson began with an alphabet song and students repeated each time what sound makes each letter of the alphabet. While a new letter was learnt, videos, audios or textbook games were used to help the learning process. As far as classroom management is concerned, when a student was loud or was not paying attention, the teacher looked at them silently and kindly asked them to concentrate. On the other hand, if a student did a good job, the teacher congratulated them with a loud and giggly voice in front of the whole class.

Grade 6 continued the reader. After reading the next two chapters from where they were left, the students were given a handout with comprehension questions based on specific chapters of the book. While the students did that, the teacher moved around the class and answered potential questions the students might have. Also, the teacher acted as a guide, as she was giving tips on how to answer the questions.

During that week, teacher focused on listening in the third grade. More specifically, students were given a handout, on which they had to fill in the gaps according to what they heard on the audio playing. Before they began the activity, the teacher suggested that if students had difficulties on remembering information, they should move onto the next gap. The listening activity was based on a YouTube video. However, the teacher didn't play the video, as students get easily distracted by images. The video was properly played after the completion of the listening activity.

Grade 4 was introduced to the unit of culture. The teacher had prepared a survey for the students, which they had to finish up until the next week. For this survey, the students had to think and write down national and international elements of culture, such as food, music, etc., and then ask members of their family or their friends to take the survey and choose between national or international object. When all the students were going to be finished with the survey, the teacher would collect the results of all the surveys and reach the final result.

After my three observation weeks were completed, I realized that I had collected useful information for both the teaching and the learning processes, and I was ready to conduct the following four activities for my Practice Teaching.