

Diversity Practicum Summary

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## **Introduction**

This semester, I took part in a little over 30 hours of Diversity practicum experience. In order to fill these hours, I spent time in several kinds of classrooms – which were all very different from each other and which all handled the diversity of their students in very different ways. The first place I spent time was on October 9th, the Day of Service, when I went to Saint Bernard Mission School (SBMS) on Standing Rock Reservation (see Appendix A). Also, throughout the semester, I've been teaching 7th grade CCD classes at Ascension Catholic Church in Bismarck (see Appendix B). The last thing I did was spent a couple of school days in a number of classrooms at Buffalo High School (BHS) in Buffalo, MN (see Appendix C).

In this paper, I will reflect on my practicum experience and what it taught me by looking at the demographics of the experiences I had, at the environmental and instructional adaptations made in light of the demographic of students, and at successful interventions beyond the classroom. I will also touch on the ideals of the Diversity Practicum – in particular, the Benedictine values as outlined in the syllabus – and how they can connect with my practicum experience.

## **Demographic**

The demographic of my three experiences varied wildly. Firstly, I spent time with students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. SBMS is an elementary school on Standing Rock Reservation. On that day, we met and played with kids who were from kindergarten to about fourth grade. At CCD classes, I teach seventh grade specifically, so mostly I see seventh graders, but also there's students from sixth to ninth grade around that I also interact with, albeit

less frequently. In Buffalo, I observed students from ninth to twelfth grade. The gender distribution of SBMS and BHS seemed about even, but the distribution in my CCD class is heavily male. I have eleven students, eight of them are male, and three are female. My CCD students are all white, to my knowledge, but both of the other experiences were a little more unique. SBMS is on an Indian reservation, so all of the students – again, to my understanding – are Native American in terms of ethnicity. The students at BHS were very diverse ethnically. There were students of lots of different ethnicities in every class I was in. I was grateful to be in this environment, because this is more like what my classroom will look like in the future, so I learned some strategies to help all of my diverse students feel comfortable in my classroom.

The socioeconomic backgrounds of the students is fairly apparent in each of the settings I was in. At SBMS, many of the students were gone for the day, so I didn't exactly get a feel for the entire group of the school. From what I saw, though, all of the students seemed to be from a similar class: around middle class. No one really seemed to have any especially fancy clothes or anything to show that they were excessively wealthy, but everyone looked well taken care of and nourished. The students in my CCD class all fall around the same socio-economic class, as well, but there's definitely a little more disparity there. These guys are in middle school, so they're more prone to comparison than those older and younger than them. They are extremely self-conscious and want to appear cool, which means wearing the most expensive brands and having the newest phone. I can see this in some of my students, and I can see that other of my students often come to class wearing the same clothes and don't have a phone or much money at all. At BHS, this was still pretty apparent. It's less blatant, it seems, in high school as it is in middle school, but students are definitely still comparing themselves to others. I saw a lot of

AirPods in students' ears, which are really expensive headphones, and to me that seemed more like a show of wealth than something that the students' actually enjoy. In public school, you're bound to see lots of kids from both ends of the spectrum, and that was not untrue of Buffalo.

In terms of cognitive and physical limitations, I also saw a variety. At SBMS, I'm not sure I saw enough of the students in order to notice these kinds of things; so, in short, I don't know. In my CCD class, I can't know for certain about cognitive limitations, but I know that I do have a variety of learners and that some are quicker to understand and some need a little more coaxing – not only to learn, but to focus and to behave appropriately long enough to understand a lesson. I also have a student with a physical disability which makes it difficult to walk and impossible to stand without help for an extended period of time. At BHS, the diversity in cognitive ability was pretty evident. In every class there was anywhere from 25 to 35 students, and in a class that size there's bound to be students of all different learning styles and struggles. It was really interesting – and honestly, really impressive and helpful – to see the strategies the teachers used to make sure every student was engaged and learning to the best of their ability.

### **Instructional Adaptations**

I noticed a lot of instructional strategies being used at BHS. I was impressed with the ways in which the teachers administered to a number of students' needs all at one time. I mentioned that there were students that were at differing levels of cognitive development in every class I was in, so that must have made it challenging for teachers to administer to the learning needs of all of those different students all at once, but they all had really good strategies for doing that. One major strategy I saw was individual and group work. What's nice about this

is that students can move at their own pace, while still retaining just as much information. They would bring the groups together as a whole group to solidify concepts and share ideas, but they would do much of the inquiry themselves, which not only helps each student, whatever their cognitive level, learn the information without falling behind, but it also helps the students learn critical thinking and research skills.

Unfortunately, I didn't see a ton of actual instruction happen at SBMS; however, I did get a tour of the Montessori classroom, which I thought was really a good approach to teaching students. It's more individualized, which gives each student, regardless of their differences, opportunity to grow and learn at their own pace and in their own style. In my own CCD classroom, I've struggled a lot with how to keep all of my students engaged, considering all of their differences from each other and from me. What's been working is focusing on them – seeing what they want to talk about and then following through on that. They tend to be respectful when the others are sharing something that matters to them, which helps them to be a little more engaged. However, this isn't always the case, which brings us to the next section.

### **Environmental Adaptations**

Some nights are better than others in terms of how well I manage my CCD classroom, and I've tried several different strategies throughout this semester to attempt to find the best practices for adapting to my students. In terms of adapting to the socio-economic diversities in my class, I mostly just don't let anyone call attention to it. I have all of my students put their phones away for the whole class, so that doesn't become an issue for classroom management, but also so it doesn't become a point of conflict between students. In regards to the cognitive and

behavioral differences, I try to make every student feel good about whatever contribution they personally and uniquely bring to the class. What's nice about what I'm teaching, in this regard, is that it has very little to do with normal academics, and I do my best to adapt my environment to reflect that. I have my desks arranged in a circle, and I've noticed that that has been a help for students who easily get distracted, because it kind of holds them accountable to being engaged because they're all watching each other. Any learning disabilities that students struggle with in school don't necessarily have to be issues in my class, simply because of the content, so that's been a help, too.

However, I do struggle with students making fun of each other for differences that they have or perceived differences. I had one student that called another "autistic" as a joke in a class at one point, and I had to make very clear that that would not be allowed in my classroom and that a person with autism has a lot of gifts to give the world and that the term certainly should not be used as an insult, because it isn't one. We have to have talks about respecting each other in our class, and respecting groups of people outside of our class on a weekly basis. I can only hope that I'm having some impact on them in this way. For my student with a physical disability, I basically just let him do whatever he needs to do to adapt to his environment. He's in seventh grade, so he knows pretty well how to adapt to his environment, but he knows that I'm willing to accommodate in any way he needs to learn best and be comfortable.

At BHS, I witness a lot of really effective strategies and adaptations in the environment, as well, for the diversity of students that each teacher had in their classroom. I was really impressed by this thing my brother did at the end of class on Tuesday: he went around the class and had each student say one thing they're grateful for. Through this, he got to know and

appreciate a little bit about each student's individual character and even culture, in some cases. One student said he was grateful for salvation, at a public school, which I thought was really cool. None of the other students looked at him funny or made fun of him for it – it was just the thing he is grateful for. I found that really cool about this setting, in particular, that he can celebrate something important to him with his classmates, and even if they don't believe the same thing, they respect him for it. It made the environment an accepting and safe one, which is one of the first things a person has to do to begin to be a good teacher.

I was really impressed with the English department's treatment of diversity at my time at BHS, especially. They were teaching, explicitly, about different topics on cultural diversity, because they were reading books directly pertaining to it. One teacher was about to start a unit on the novel *The Color Purple* and he had the students look up different cultural significances of colors, especially in African and African American culture. Through this, the students kind of got to share a little bit about their own cultures and how colors are viewed as symbols in that, too. Another English teacher was teaching a graphic novel about the Holocaust, and discussing different ideals of family and what it means to be a hero based on the particular situation these people were in. One teacher had his students reading a choice novel, and they were going to do a project and presentation about it, too, which can always reveal something about a student's own culture and whatever culture the person in their book has as well. That same teacher was also teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which has as one of its themes appreciation for cultures that aren't your own. These are all ideas that work hand-in-hand with English teaching that I plan to stick in my back pocket for the future.

Unfortunately, again, I didn't get to see any actual instruction happening at SBMS, but the environment of the school was very welcoming and seemed like it would be a safe environment to learn and adapt in. However, I did see connections between the community and the school when I was there, and that leads me to the next section.

### **Beyond the Classroom**

The community outreach and integration at SBMS was the clearest that I saw in my practicum experience. I was so impressed by how interwoven the community seemed to be with the school. My favorite example of this was the church. Not only was it a beautiful example of blending culture into religion – with the shape of a teepee and the statue of Saint Kateri, etc. – but it was also a beautiful example of bringing the community and the school together. Any time you attach a church to a school, all of a sudden the community is involved, inherently. Families and others in the community gather together at the church and that would really build support for the school, I'm sure. Another way I was impressed with the community-school connection was that the students really seemed to feel like they were a sort of family. The day I was there, a student's dog was just roaming around the school grounds and everyone knew the dog and was comfortable with it. That doesn't happen just anywhere, and it really shows how interconnected community and home life is to school life.

In my CCD classroom, for the most part, I only see my students once a week and I don't have a ton of opportunity for outreach outside of that. However, I do attend Mass several times a week at Ascension and sometimes see my students there. Also, honestly, this opportunity and my



participation at Ascension have been really good outside of school community building opportunities for me, personally.

At BHS, I didn't have a ton of opportunity to see outreach actions that were being taken, and in some way, that's because there's less than there would be at SBMS or even Ascension, because it's a school and not a church. However, this does not mean that there is no community or home outreach. My brother is a wrestling coach, and I think extracurriculars are a big way that community and home outreach is achieved in public school especially. My brother also did a good job at letting students talk about what they did over the weekend, if they wanted to share, and that sort of helps him get to know his students and helps them get to know what the world of the other is like outside of school. In addition, one of the other teachers had assigned a biography project in which the students were to write a biography of someone in their life, and this is definitely a really cool way to bring home into the classroom and to bring the classroom into the home for everyone involved. This was especially cool for me, because it's something I can do in my own classroom someday.

### **Connections to Values**

On the syllabus for this course, in relation to the Benedictine values of the University of Mary, it says: "This course incorporates the Benedictine Values of community where mutual respect is evident, hospitality where all are welcome regardless of learning styles, respect for persons where everyone's opinion is welcomed." This really is what I got out of this practicum. It opened my eyes to a whole range of diverse needs and lots of new skills in responding to those needs with respect and hospitality and promoting community. As is evident by my personal

examples of my teaching CCD classes, I'm not perfect at this yet, nor will I ever be. This profession will continue to push me to grow, though, and I think starting to do that – to grow – little by little, with the help of this practicum for sure.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout my practicum experience at SBMS, BHS, and Ascension Catholic Church, I was introduced to new demographics, new strategies in instructional and environmental adaptations, and community outreach. I also saw some of the Benedictine values in practice in the real world, and they inspired me to become a better teacher in the future. I hope to cultivate the same kind of community through mutual respect that is outlined here, through letting my students know that each of them is valued – like my brother does when he asks them all what they're thankful for and what they did with their family over the weekend. I hope to cultivate hospitality in my classroom environment by showing the students that they are all welcome however they learn – like the Montessori style teacher did in her classroom at SBMS. I hope to continue to strive for the kind of respect for persons where every person's opinion is welcomed – like I try to cultivate in my classroom at CCD. All of these ideals will be things I will have to continue to work on as I move towards becoming the best teacher I can be, and this practicum was a really effective way to start.

**Appendix A**



(Taken from the UMary Liffrig Family School of Education and Behavioral Sciences Facebook page)

## Appendix B

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [ascensionbismarck.org/children-youth-formation](http://ascensionbismarck.org/children-youth-formation). The navigation menu includes Home, About, Liturgy, Faith Formation (highlighted), Stewardship Life, and Calendar. The main content area is titled "CHILDREN/YOUTH FORMATION" and contains a "WELCOME!" message from Faith Formation Coordinators Jessica Mattson and Hannah Smith. Below the welcome message is a "FAITH FORMATION MISSION STATEMENT" section. A sidebar on the left lists various resources under "FAITH FORMATION", "CLASS SESSIONS", and "DOCUMENTS".

ascensionbismarck.org/children-youth-formation

Home About Liturgy Faith Formation Stewardship Life Calendar

### CHILDREN/YOUTH FORMATION

#### WELCOME!

I would like to express a heartfelt thank you for registering your child in Ascension's Faith Formation Program! Please help us this year by praying for and with your child at every opportunity as well as leading them to the Sacraments as often as possible. The only one who loves your child more than yourself is Jesus Christ. It is through prayer, grace, and formation wherein they can authentically come to a relationship with Him. Please don't hesitate to contact us at the church if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you and I am so excited to see your child grow this year!

Peace,  
Jessica Mattson and Hannah Smith  
Faith Formation Coordinators  
258-5692

#### FAITH FORMATION MISSION STATEMENT

Ascension's Faith Formation is rooted in the vision and mission of Ascension parish. Our Faith Formation program is for all generations and all people. Faith Formation in the parish happens in the liturgy, prayer, within our homes, and by serving those in need. Ascension Faith Formation is a call to reach out beyond one's self and community and answer our baptismal call to grow in our faith and share the Good News.

**FAITH FORMATION**

- Children/Youth Formation
- Sacraments
- Youth Ministry
- Adult Formation
- Light of Christ Catholic Schools

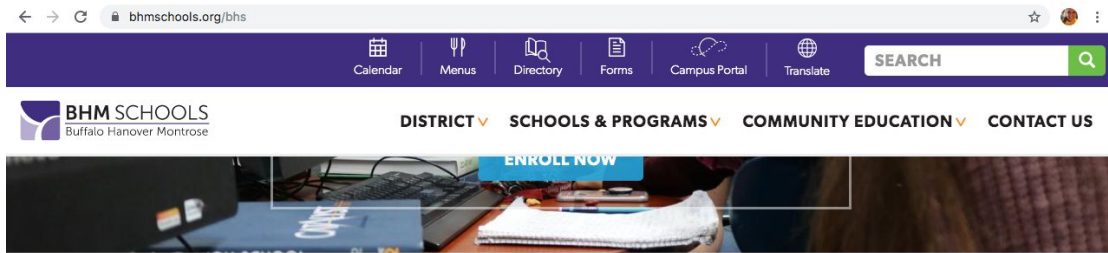
**CLASS SESSIONS**

- 4:00-5:00 PM** Grades – 1<sup>st</sup> thru 5<sup>th</sup>
- 5:30-6:30 PM** Grades – 1<sup>st</sup> thru 5<sup>th</sup>
- 7:00-8:15 PM** Grades – 6<sup>th</sup> thru 9<sup>th</sup>

**DOCUMENTS**

- Faith Formation Handbook
- Stewardship Service Project

## Appendix C



[home](#) » [schools & programs](#) » [high school](#) » buffalo high school

### Buffalo High School

**ADDRESS**  
877 Bison Blvd  
Buffalo, MN 55313  
United States  
[Open Map](#)

**PRINCIPAL**  
Mark Mischke

**BUFFALO HIGH SCHOOL** is one of the state's most outstanding schools, with 1,950 students in grades 9-12 who outpace state averages in every way. The school's continuous approach to plan, work and reflect results in an atmosphere of innovation and inspiration. Students learn early that the motto to "be nice, be proud, work hard, and model behavior" is genuinely ingrained in all the school has to offer. As the only school in the state offering the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, BHS is advancing students' ability to earn college credits without sacrificing the high school experience.

**BE NICE, BE PROUD, WORK HARD, MODEL BEHAVIOR**