H. Practicum Reflection

1. Interpretation of student learning:
   - What were the learning goals/objectives as identified by your cooperating teacher?
     The main learning goal/objective identified by my cooperating teacher was to prepare her students for the 4-year old class. One of main ways of achieving this was by building phonemic awareness and concepts about print. By the end of the class, the students should be able to recognize the graphemes and phonemes of the alphabet. Another goal/objective was for each student to learn his name. Recognizing basic colors and shapes, the days of the week, and basic weather patterns were also learning goals. Furthermore, an improvement in social and adaptive skills was expected.

   - What evidence exists to demonstrate student learning or mastery of the learning goals/objectives?
     Many types of evidence exist to demonstrate student learning and mastery of the learning goals in Mrs. Cantwell’s classroom. The main form is through formative assessment and observation. She is constantly giving the students opportunities to demonstrate their learning through hands-on activities and questions, which reveal their progress. I was able to notice learning goals being met every time I went through the observation of student responses. It is also apparent that social and adaptive skills have improved greatly over the course of the semester. At the beginning, many students did not respond at all to questions, but now they can answer correctly! The students are beginning to interact and speak to each other and eat their snacks on their own. I have also observed significant changes in defiant behavior of several students. Each time I come I am amazed by student growth! Once a year, a formal assessment is given in order to revaluate the IEP. This test is comprehensive and includes test items related to cognitive, social, adaptive, and speech skills. This is a more tangible form of evidence of student learning. As a final note, from an outside perspective, I can tell that steps are consistently being taken to ensure student learning. The lessons always align with the objectives and goals and practice desired behaviors and responses.

   - What barriers did the teacher encounter in reaching the stated goals/objectives (i.e. student differences, learning abilities, learning styles, discipline, interruptions, etc.?)
     Mrs. Cantwell encountered several barriers to reaching her stated goals and objectives. First and foremost, some of her students have extreme daily outbursts, which prohibit these students from learning and distract the other students. Many of her students also have problems with retention. One child may understand a concept one day, which is evident by formative
assessment, but a week later after a lot of practice, not be able to complete the exact same task. Yet another barrier is that one of her students is an English Language Learner. This presents unique challenges considering his inability to use the English language well must be distinguished from his disability. In this particular classroom, many ELL strategies such as the use of visual aids and hands-on learning are used; therefore, improper instruction is a non-issue. It is difficult to tell as an outside observer the learning abilities of the students; however, the students seem to be on a spectrum. Some students pick up on concepts faster than others while. A victory for some students is obedience and participation while for others, a victory is a correct response. Because of the uniqueness of each student and his needs, it is very difficult to write reasonable goals and objectives that are attainable for every student. It is inevitable that certain barriers will prohibit some students from learning and be a non-issue for others.

- **Determine and explain if the teacher’s methodology with respect to meeting individual needs was effective or ineffective.**
  
  Mrs. Cantwell is a highly trained, effective teacher. Her methodology appeals to all learning styles and disabilities represented in her room. She incorporates a lot of visual aids, hands-on learning, and technology, which really are great strategies for all learners. She also places a large emphasis on life skills, which is excellent for her preschool students that need direct instruction in how to function at school, at home, and in the world. I have witnessed her success in teaching students about cleanliness and politeness in particular. Though some of her students are unresponsive at times, they are included in all the activities. It is apparent that she does not exclude difficult cases and that she believes every child can learn.

2. **Insight on best practices and assessments as related to students:**

- **What methods or instructional strategies did the teacher use to motivate student learning?**
  
  Mrs. Cantwell uses interactive technology as well as dramatic play to motivate her students to learn. She truly tries to make learning fun, especially for preschool students. Her mini-lessons are packed with songs and interactive games on the SMARTboard that are constantly requiring student participation. A large part of the class time is devoted to dramatic play, which is both fun and educational. Whenever the unit changes, the toys and activities change as well. For example, during a unit about health and wellness, the dramatic play classroom had stations with doctor and veterinary supplies. A month or so later, the classroom had a store and McDonalds set up for the students. This activity does not seem like learning for the students, but it is teaching them valuable life skills. In general activities, Mrs. Cantwell does not ever bribe the children. She does not need to because she has skillfully structured the day to include frequent breaks and opportunities for movement and engagement.
What aspects of the classroom’s environment (aesthetic value) and structure (community interaction) were evident during your observation?

Mrs. Cantwell’s classroom is well organized and aesthetically pleasing for the students. The regular classroom has posters on the wall and a variety of colors are used. The classroom used for dramatic play is very bright and has a wide variety of toys to play with. The stations are always aesthetically pleasing and inviting as well as easily accessible. There are also several posters on the wall in this room and a variety of colors are used.

The structure of the regular classroom promotes community interaction because the students are seated in a semi-circle facing the SMARTboard and teacher. Students can easily see their peers as well as the front of the classroom. Occasionally, the students are asked to interact with their neighbor during an activity and the set-up facilitates this well. The snack tables are also semi-circle tables that allow the students visibility and community interaction. Though the students do not generally converse with each other, this is mostly on account of their problems with speech and language and underdeveloped social skills rather than the set up of the classroom or the instructional practices. The dramatic play classroom stations promote community interaction because students wanting to play with the same toys must share space as well as objects. Overall, the classroom environment is extremely inviting for students and should be a model for other teachers.

3. Alignment of learning goals with assessment data:

- List teacher’s assessments (formal and informal) used to monitor/determine student progress.

Mrs. Cantwell mainly uses informal assessments to determine student progress. She always has the power of observation in determining level of attentiveness and comprehension, but she also frequently asks her students questions. These questions generally illicit kinesthetic responses. She always has each student respond to a question at the end up her lesson before lining up for the next activity. These questions generally require the student to make a choice with a physical response. I have also seen some formal norm-referenced testing to determine student progress. These assessments were administered by the speech pathologist that works in the classroom with the students. According to Mrs. Cantwell, once a year a formal assessment is given in order to revaluate the IEP. This test is comprehensive and includes test items related to cognitive, social, adaptive, and speech skills.

4. Implications of a Christian worldview in the learning community:

- State ways in which you could incorporate your Christian worldview within the context of this classroom.

In a public school setting, the best way to incorporate my Christian worldview is to teach by biblical principles. This can be executed by
demonstrating godly values in my own life, building up students and openly acknowledging their value, and modeling moral behavior. In this particular classroom I would focus on encouraging the students and letting them know that I love and value them as much as anyone else. I would also address moral issues from a biblical perspective when the situation arises.

5. Implications for future teaching and professional development:

- Identify and examine successes in the classroom and explain your rationale as to why you feel these activities/instructional strategies were successful.

Probably the most successful strategies I saw in this classroom were persistent repetition and positive reinforcement and encouragement. In this classroom, the majority of successes that I saw were small victories. I saw a child that displayed autistic tendencies start the year unresponsive to questions and defiant and end the semester responding to questions correctly. I saw another child with frequent emotional outbursts become calmer as time went on and develop and execute coping strategies by himself. I saw many other children begin to develop better speech production and to retain information from week to week. I saw a child that could not produce the sounds in his name start recognize and produce the beginning sound correctly. All of these small victories were only possible through patience and praise. The repetition provided in the lessons and constant formative assessment and participation opportunities really helped these children grow. Also, the opportunity for students to interact with other people in different contexts during dramatic play really allowed the students to constantly practice their speech skills and demonstrate their knowledge.

- What methods, activities, and/or instructional strategies will be beneficial for you to learn more about, and what steps will you take to ensure your professional growth in these areas?

There are two areas that I would like to learn more about. One is correcting student behavior. I observed in this class that positive reinforcement was used a lot to diminish negative behaviors; however, occasionally, additional consequences became necessary. I am lost when it comes to knowing how to be consistent, fair, and effective in punishment. I know that one day soon I will have instruction on classroom management, but I’d really like to start exploring different discipline strategies and philosophies. The best way to grow in this way is to read research and ask teachers or my professors their opinions. The second area of interest is in speech pathology and linguistics techniques. This practicum opened up my eyes to the benefits of speech pathology and the amazing reward that comes with giving students a voice. I have already learned some linguistics techniques in Descriptive Linguistics; however, I would like to learn more. To grow in this area I could read research or pick Dr. Livingston’s brain for practical ways to use linguistics as a tool in the classroom. I also could consider higher education in speech pathology or linguistics.