



SMU

ANNETTE CALDWELL SIMMONS  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
& HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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To Whom It May Concern,

In the Fall 2012 semester, I was given the opportunity to serve as a Teaching Assistant to Dr. Candace Walkington in EDU5355, a course for preservice elementary mathematics teachers. I attended all scheduled weekly class meetings, participated regularly in classroom activities, and developed and taught a unit of the course. Additionally, I assisted Dr. Walkington with course setup in MyEducationLab, and took part in grading lesson plans and project reports from the students.

In a typical class meeting, Dr. Walkington varied the activities and presented well-crafted lessons to engage the students. There were short lectures, relevant video clips (typically of elementary mathematics students in a classroom setting), and numerous hands-on activities. Students were asked to work individually, in pairs, and in small groups, and were given opportunities to provide feedback and formative summaries in each class session both individually and cooperatively. I could easily observe that the students in the course were actively participating and thoroughly engaged in the material.

Through this opportunity, I gained valuable experience and learned several key items. Most importantly, I was able to both observe and participate in more student-centered, inquiry based learning processes than were taught in my own teacher preparation coursework almost twenty years ago. Dr. Walkington explained both the rationale and research which supports these inquiry based processes, and also did a wonderful job of the allowing the students to discover for themselves the need for a balance between student-centered lessons and more traditional teaching methods.

Because my teaching preparation and experience is strictly secondary, I had not been presented with explicit methods for teaching PK-6 mathematics topics prior to this experience. I was able to gain knowledge of which topics are presented in each grade, as well as student-centered approaches to the pedagogy.

Further, I was able to observe the use and practice of skills with several manipulatives (linking cubes, attribute blocks, base-10 blocks, pattern blocks, tangrams, calculators) that had not been part of any teacher preparation that I had experienced in a secondary pathway. Dr. Walkington presented activities that were engaging and interesting, as well as content rich and mathematically challenging.

The opportunity to serve as a Teaching Assistant to Dr. Walkington has been an enriching and elevating experience. Her natural rapport with students, high level of content knowledge, and clear organization of lessons made the course enjoyable and educational to all who attended, both myself and the enrolled students.

Sincerely,

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