Kidwatching or How to Observe Children

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Abstract

This paper looks at a particular student and examines his learning needs within his classroom and also suggests some adjustments that could be made to enhance his learning abilities. In addition to this, the paper also places the student into different cognitive and psychosocial stages, along with identifying his learning style as defined by Howard Gardner.
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During the process of observing Matthew, who is a third grader in a blended classroom, I now have a better understanding of his specific learning needs. As of right now, Matthew’s desk is located in the front of the room near the chalkboard. However, it is not directly in the middle of the class and therefore if the teacher is at the chalkboard she is most likely to have her back towards him in order to face the majority of the class. Since Matthew’s attention span seems to be limited, based on my observations while I was watching him on his inability to keep his eyes on the teacher and also his inability to stay on task, this is not the best placement for him within the classroom. He needs to have the teacher facing him for the majority of the day. In addition to his attention span, Matthew is a fidgety child who is in constant motion. He is continually rearranging himself in his seat from standing to kneeling to laying his head on the desk, and therefore more times than not he ends up being on the student’s desk next to his. He would be better off being moved to a different spot within the room, not only for his sake but also for the sake of the students next to him. The desks are currently positioned into groups of five, with four desks making a square and the fifth on the end of the square. I think that rather than having Matthew’s desk in with the group of four, his desk should be facing the front of the class and should be the fifth desk in the group nearest to the chalkboard. This would ensure that he would be at his own desk, not bothering other children while they are at work and it would also be easier for the teacher to keep her eye on him to redirect his attention as needed.

Seeing as how Matthew is very fidgety and restless, it would be in his best interest for him to have a hands-on activity in which he can be an active part of his learning. For
the most part in his class the teacher tries to make as much of the learning material hands-on as she can; however, when the teacher is introducing new material to the class she often just explains the material while asking questions to the children to ensure that her students understand the concept that she is teaching. It is during this time when Matthew seems to be the most squirmy and uneasy. This is another reason why it would be a great idea to move his desk closer to the teacher in order for her to redirect his focus and be sure he is grasping the new material. However, since the greater part of the day is reviewing and putting into effect the previously learned material, it is great that the majority of the class material is geared toward his learning style, in that his teacher tries her hardest to get the students involved in the lessons as much as possible. Another aspect of his classroom environment that seems to better suit his learning needs is the fact that he is in a blended classroom, where roughly about 1/3 of his class consists of students with special needs. These particular students move to another room for Language Arts and Math, which is better suited to meet their needs. Since these students leave the classroom it leaves the teacher with fewer students to attend to, which thereby lets her give more directed attention and help to the students that remain in the class. This helps Matthew because it allows the teacher to spend more time with him answering any of his questions and it also benefits him because the class size is smaller which thereby allows the teacher to do more hands-on, fun learning activities.

Based on my observations of Matthew during different times of the day and different days altogether, I have come to some conclusions as to what cognitive stage and psychosocial stage he is currently at, and also what style of learning best fits him according to Howard Gardner. Gardner believes that there are eight different
intelligences that differentiate how people learn and understand new material (Packet 1, xi). I believe that Matthew possess a combination of the eight intelligences; however the one that I think that best fits him is the Body/Kinesthetic intelligence. If given the opportunity I believe that Matthew would learn best if he were asked to act out a scene from the Civil war, rather than just reading a book and doing a report on the Civil war. I chose this intelligence for Matthew because of all of the fidgeting he does through out the day. I think that if he had something productive to do with his body he would do it and he would learn a great deal about what he was doing. In addition to just learning the information for a limited amount of time, I think that because he had a major role in the learning of the information it would stick with him for along duration of time. Matthew has a lot of energy and it does not suit him to just sit at his desk and learn from a worksheet or a test, he needs to be up doing something in order to keep his attention.

In addition to Gardner’s eight intelligences, I believe that according to Piaget’s stages of Cognitive Development, Matthew falls in the stage of concrete operational. He is able to solve hands-on problems and he understands the concept of reversibility. According to Woolfolk, to effectively teach the concrete operational child one must “make sure presentations and readings are brief and well organized”, they must “use familiar examples to explain more complex ideas” and should “continue to give students a chance to manipulate and test objects” (2004, p.37). In observing Matthew I can see that if any of these guidelines were omitted within the classroom he would not be able to comprehend the material or the instructions given. Therefore, it is easy to see that he falls into this stage of cognitive development.
According to Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development, I believe that Matthew fits into the fourth stage, which is the industry v. inferiority stage. Mostly all of the students in Matthew’s class fit into this stage because of their age and the fact that they are in school. According to Woolfolk, the description of the child during this stage is that they “must deal with demands to learn new skills or risk a sense of inferiority, failure, and incompetence” (2004, p. 66). In the observation of Matthew I noticed that the only time he raised his hand to answer a question was when he was positive of the answer. I am guessing that like the other students he was afraid of getting the answer wrong and being embarrassed. Furthermore, even though he does seem to get off task a lot he eventually gets his work done; sometimes because he is told to do so by his teacher but other times it may be because he does not want to be ridiculed or looked down upon by his classmates.

In doing this kidwatching child study, I have learned a great deal about Matthew in particular, but also about how to look at and observe children in order to figure out the best possible way that they learn and how to use this information to adapt a lesson to better suit their needs. Sometimes it comes down to the seating arrangement in a classroom, and other times it is the type of activities that enhance the students learning. Kidwatching is something that needs time in order to work; however once you sit down and observe the child you can learn so much from them and about them.
References