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Final Project

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Final Project

Tyler Keller

HONR 450

Dr. Dahlman

My experience through the AVID tutoring program has allowed me to grow in so many ways. AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a class for students in grades 9th - 12th that focuses on preparing students for college. Many of the students have good test scores but may lack in other areas such as notetaking, organizational skills, and family support. My role, as a tutor, is to work in a group of four or five students to answer problems that they may have from their homework or tests. However, AVID is unique in the fact that the tutors don't just give the student the answer. Instead, it is their job to ask the right questions that guide the student's thinking. Not only have I helped with tutoring, but I have also helped with binder checks, managing the classroom, answering questions, and even teaching a lesson. All of these experiences in the classroom have taught me valuable skills to better prepare myself for the future as a math teacher. There have been specific experiences that I believe have allowed me to grow in my competency areas. With the help of these new experiences, I have been able to develop a personal action plan for the future to continue to learn and grow as an educator.

One skill AVID has taught me is the importance of first impressions and building connections. First impressions are important in any new situations. They set the tone for what the remainder of the relationship will be like. Through my past leadership experiences, I have always tried to be open and enthusiastic when meeting others for the first time. As a Community Advisor (CA) I was open and welcoming to all of my residents. Setting the tone early allowed my residents to build trust with me and feel comfortable enough to ask me questions. I used this same strategy on the first day of AVID where we had to present a poem we had written about ourselves. I presented my poem with enthusiasm (although I was a little nervous) being open and

honest about who I was. As time went on, I had more opportunities to talk one-on-one with students. One particular student I was able to connect quite well with. This student was failing nearly all of his classes with only twelve days left of the semester. I was asked by my mentor teacher to work with him to develop a plan on how he could get his grades up. The student was very embarrassed to show me his grades but I was reassuring with him and explained that there was still time. At first, he was timid and hesitant to say much of anything, but after I told him about how I wrestled in high school, we immediately had a connection. He was also a wrestler and he shared with me how he was looking forward to this upcoming season. This served as the spark I needed to truly be able to support this student. Thinking back to the class, *Developing Your Mentor Philosophy*, one of the key components of my personal mentor philosophy was to build relationships through connecting with students. A mentor and mentee can build a solid relationship if they feel as though they have something in common. Trust can be established which, in turn, allows the duo to work well together. This is no different in a teacher-student relationship. If a teacher builds a relationship with a student, the student will feel more comfortable asking the teacher questions, which will have a positive impact on that student's grades. Needless to say, first impressions and building solid relationships are highly important in a classroom setting. However, I've learned so much more about being a teacher through some of the difficulties I faced through this experience.

As an AVID tutor, I faced many challenges while working in the classroom. Just being in the classroom has allowed me to see firsthand some of the difficulties teachers face daily. One challenge I continue to face is that students are not fully committed to the AVID process. AVID requires students to take Cornell notes, participate in tutorials and then write reflections on this process. Everything the students do is for a purpose. There is factual evidence that shows

students who do these things perform better in the classroom. However, students don't see this. On more than one occasion I have heard students say, "Why do we need to do this?". As someone with minimal experience, this can be challenging to hear. I have tried to listen to what my mentor teachers say in response to this question. Instead of making something up, my mentor teachers explain the facts. For example, many of the students dread taking Cornell notes. This type of notetaking style can be lengthy and does require some extra work from the students. However, Cornell notes are an excellent resource to use when studying for a test. When done correctly, students can read a summary they wrote that sums up an entire section in a few sentences. It is much more efficient than reading an entire section again. Sometimes students just need to hear the facts in order for them to be convinced. After all, knowing how to take proper notes is a skill many people don't know how to do, even in the college level. Learning about it in high school puts these students at such an advantage for the future.

Another challenge I have faced is finding ways to motivate students. Some of the students I work with seemingly don't want to be there, which can make working with them extremely difficult. While I am in the classroom, I continue to observe what students enjoy and what they don't. However, I have not found a definitive answer about what motivates students. It varies greatly between each student. Oddly enough, this is what I am doing my research on. The goal is to research what motivation is and talk with teachers to see what works for their classroom. Using this data, I hope to be able to compare the responses of teachers to create a list that I could use in my future classroom. Although finding ways to motivate students can be difficult, I am hoping my research project will give me ideas I can start to apply during my student teaching experiences. Another important idea to consider in students is their engagement in the classroom. There are certain students in the classroom that just don't seem engaged during

class. Although teachers can't change a student's motivation, they can support the student's engagement in a few ways. First, teachers need to be excited! If teachers are happy to be there, students will reflect this. I also think lesson plans can be designed to support engagement in students. Boring lessons are surely to lose the attention of students very quickly. Hands-on projects, group activities, or presenting information in a way other than just teaching at the board are excellent ways to make learning fun. Although my experiences in the classroom have been minimal, they have allowed me to notice the little things such as motivation and engagement within each student. Being in an AVID classroom has certainly presented me with challenges. Although I have struggled at times, this experience has allowed me to realize just how far I have grown as an educator.

I have gained valuable experiences through AVID that have allowed me to grow as an educator and make myself more aware about my strengths and weaknesses. Each time I am in the classroom I have the opportunity to compare teaching styles within my mentor teachers. I have come to learn what does and doesn't work with students. After nearly a full semester in the classroom, I have a better idea about what I believe makes a successful teacher. First, I believe teachers need to come in with a positive attitude each day regardless of how they are feeling. Students feed off of the teacher's attitude and body language. If a teacher isn't fully invested in the classroom, the students will surely feel the same way. Secondly, I have learned that teachers are learning everyday just like the students. Often times a teacher will have a lesson planned going into a class that may turn out to be a complete disaster. A good teacher will turn around and revise the lesson accordingly to prepare for the next class. I had the opportunity to experience this firsthand when I was asked to teach a simple mini algebra lesson to AVID 9 students.

This was my first time ever actually teaching in front of a class. During the first class, the lesson went pretty well. Students participated in answering questions I asked them and they were engaged in the lesson. However, when I went through it the first time I realized I missed some information that may have been beneficial. In the next class I was able to remember such information and revise how I stated things in the earlier class so it was clearer and easier to understand. Regardless of how a lesson went, there is always room for improvement. One final skill I believe to be necessary in successful teachers is that they must interact with students in a way that makes learning fun and enjoyable. Teachers must be able to present information in a way that students are engaged and excited about learning. I am getting a chance to do this as a coach for the Mankato elementary wrestling program. Coaching and teaching are similar in the fact that each one is trying to teach a set of skills that can be used in the future. At wrestling practice, one has to explain a wrestling move slowly and with great detail so kids understand it. I have faced some difficulty with kids who are rowdy and don't like to listen, but through past leadership experiences I have learned to be patient and understanding towards my peers. Being a tutor/teacher is similar. If students aren't understanding a concept, it is important to be patient and restate it in a different way so students do get it. All of these skills are very important as a future teacher. These are skills that I will continue to develop through AVID and further experiences in the classroom. AVID has also allowed me to learn more about my personal strengths and weaknesses.

Working with students in the classroom has allowed me to see what I excel at and what I could improve on. First, I believe I am very good at making connections with students. This is a skill I developed through my role as a CA. I have found that students feel comfortable talking to me about both school and their personal lives. I am approachable and truly care about their well-

being. Another skill I feel confident in is my ability to speak in front of an audience. If teachers seem timid or nervous in front of the classroom, students see this and may start feeling more confident in doing things they shouldn't be doing. One place I could see myself improving on is being more authoritative. Since students feel comfortable around me, this sometimes gets me in trouble. Students feel as though they can get away with things around me. I think this is something I need to work on. In the classroom, there is a time to have fun and there is a time to learn. I believe it is important for me to be clear to my future students about this. I had a teacher in high school who was super nice and liked to have fun but students took advantage of him because of it. His class was chaotic which made learning difficult. This is what I want to avoid in my classroom. Although I still have a long way to go, my experience through AVID have allowed me to start thinking about an action plan for the future.

Through my experience with AVID, I have decided to set goals for myself so I can continue to develop my skills as a leader in the classroom. One goal I have set for myself is to practice my question-asking skills by asking level one, level two and level three questions while participating in the tutorial process. This is a skill that any teacher must have and it can only be learned through repetition. Tutorials are great opportunities to ask questions to guide a student's thinking. After all, the goal of tutoring is not to simply solve the student's question for them but rather ask them questions which guide them to the answer. I plan to achieve this goal by using a questioning sheet we were provided with during our AVID training. The sheet is full of questioning words such as "analyze, compare, contrast, predict, etc.", which can be used to help guide the tutor. With this as a resource, I hope to be able to practice this important skill.

Another goal of mine is to determine what motivates students. Through my research project I have learned about project-based learning and I am in the process of speaking with

teachers to determine what they have found to be motivating in the classroom. My goal is that by February of next year I will have a better understanding about what motivates students. This is important as a future teacher. If I have a better understanding about what motivates students, it will give me the opportunity to try some of my findings for myself through my student teaching experience. Here, I can test my findings personally and have a better idea for when I actually have a job in the future.

An important goal for myself is to be intentional about talking with teachers to learn new strategies and techniques about dealing with difficult students. How do you deal with a student that fails to do any homework? What advice do you have for new teachers when speaking in front of a class for the first time? How do you manage a classroom? These, and many more, are questions that would benefit me greatly as I prepare to teach lessons in the next year. I am in the classroom with three different teachers all of which have different teaching styles. My goal is to hear from each of them and then determine what strategy I believe is the most appropriate in a given situation. I also help coach elementary wrestling with a math teacher from Mankato. I have been amazed at how he has been able to stand in front of 45 K-2nd graders who are full of energy and gain their attention. I haven't talked to him personally but I would like to introduce myself to him at an upcoming practice. I believe he could serve as a great resource for the future.

My final goal is to seize any opportunity to teach a lesson to a class. I did this for the first time recently and it went really well. However, there are certainly things to improve on. My mentor teacher said he would be willing to let me teach lessons in the future if I feel comfortable doing so. During my first lesson teaching I was far from comfortable, but I learned so much during that experience. For this reason, I hope to push myself and go out of my comfort zone to continue to get experience in front of a class. After all, practicing is the best way to continue to

grow. Any experience in front of the class I get now will only benefit me in the upcoming year when I actually start teaching lessons as a part of my education classes.

AVID has presented me with multiple opportunities to develop my leadership skills. First, I have been able to practice working as a group with fellow teachers. I have learned the importance of communication in collaborating towards a common goal. All teachers' goals are to have their students succeed and reach their goals. Being able to collaborate and work effectively with fellow teachers is necessary to achieve such goal. I've also been able to compare my personal philosophies to philosophies of fellow teachers. I have been able to test my personal mentor philosophy that I created last year in my *Developing Your Mentor Philosophy* class. I have found that my ideas in that paper reflect my teaching style in the classroom. Finally, I am continuing to develop my leadership skills through other leadership roles. Most recently, my role as an elementary wrestling coach has allowed me to share my passion of wrestling with others. Through this opportunity, I have gained valuable skills such as working with younger students, speaking in front of an audience, and comparing teaching/coaching styles between the different coaches that help out in the wrestling room each week.

It has been truly amazing to see just how far I have come. From helping my friends with math homework in high school and college, to serving as an AVID tutor, and now actually teaching a lesson in front of a class; I have come a long way! I have gained so many important skills through leadership roles such as my role as a Community Advisor position, coaching elementary wrestling practices, and now serving as an AVID tutor. All of these experiences have helped shape where I am today. However, there is still a lot to learn. With the help of my newly designed action plan, I hope to continue to make intentional efforts to grow as a future educator and continue to grow in my leadership skills in the classroom.