

## Practicum Reflection

When I first started the Practicum this quarter, I wasn't sure what to expect, but I had a few ambitious goals. I had several projects I had in mind to do with the students at the Urban Discovery Academy: starting a garden, taking field trips to Balboa Park, and teaching them new languages. I had no idea how the kids at UDA would receive us; I just hoped that they would like me!

On the first day, I connected with a bright, curious sixth grade boy – Manuel. It was a great experience working with him in the computer lab, and it made me look forward to getting to know the other students. The first couple of weeks at the school were like dipping my toes in the water. I was a little cautious and reserved, but the kids warmed up to me. As the weeks went by, I found a way to connect with many of the students – boys and girls of all grade levels. To some kids, I was the college student that they could always ask for help with their homework. Others remembered me as the person who led that fun cultural activity that they enjoyed. Other kids just enjoyed talking to me about whatever was on their mind, and I would listen. The kids were really curious about my background (and those of my fellow undergrads), and were also eager to talk to us about their personal lives. It was incredible how the kids just opened up to us and accepted us in their social circles. Around week three I would arrive and a bunch of kids would smile and wave at me; that was when I knew I wasn't a stranger anymore.

As we started planning the “UCSD Enrichment” activities we would introduce to the kids, it was like starting a new chapter all over again. We were the first outside group to try to incorporate any activities like these into the Extended Day, so it was an exciting experiment for us. Our first day of activities was one of the most memorable days for me at UDA. We set up different cultural stations to teach the kids about Mexico, and I had the privilege of teaching a dance. I had the CD of music, but beyond that, I just winged it. The kids and I had so much fun dancing. It felt amazing to be able to lead these students, from K-7 grades, and seeing them participate and have fun learning something new. Many kids came back to my station at the end of the hour just to keep dancing! That first day of activities gave me a lot of hope for the upcoming opportunities we had to engage the kids in fun learning.

As the weeks went on, we continued to have lessons on countries from around the globe, and we refined our “rotating stations” model. Some of the highlights of these lessons, for me, were leading a Jeopardy Power Point game on Egypt, leading the French vocabulary game, and sculpting with clay. It has been fulfilling for me to lead activities that the kids were excited to be a part of. However, there were a few days when I struggled to keep the activities going. On China day, I had trouble keeping the older students interested in a map and compass activity I set up. It seemed that the older students were more interested in gossip than in learning about China's landmarks, and it was hard for me to get them to listen. I also struggled on the first day I tried to lead the French vocabulary lesson. I think the way I went about teaching the vocabulary was a bit confusing at first, and it didn't help that I had many boys in my group who were loud and excitable. However, when Jen and David helped me organize all the kids, I found a way

to teach key French words through a game in a way that was simple and engaging for the kids. Once the kids are having fun with an activity, it is no problem getting them to participate.

Aside from planning and leading the activities, some of the greatest challenges for me have been helping struggling students with their homework. In the beginning, it was hard for me to help some of the younger students with math homework, because I didn't know how to teach them basic concepts such as multiplication. It has been so long since I was their age; I couldn't remember how I was taught. However, the greater challenge has been motivating some students to actually do their homework. The example that stands out in my mind is Zoe – who would ask me for the answers whenever I approached her, and reluctantly attempted to do any work, if she attempted at all. Other students, such as Manuel, would have so much homework to do that they would get discouraged. Manuel (and a few other students) rarely finished all of his homework in time to participate in the extra-curricular activities we planned – even as his work ethic improved. Sometimes I feel a little sad for these students who almost always miss out on the activities, because of the sheer volume of homework they have to do.

By the end of the quarter, I did not share all of the activities I had in mind, although I did enjoy teaching the kids some French and Spanish. I realized that some of the goals I had in mind just weren't practical, but I replaced them with other ideas for lessons that were just as fun. When it came to helping students with their homework, I felt it was important to encourage each student and build up their confidence by showing that I believed that they could solve the problems, and highlighting their successes as proof that they were capable. Sometimes the best way to help was by just being there and showing that I cared. As an improvement for next quarter, I would like to learn more methods to motivate students that are especially discouraged by their homework. I would also like to learn some more constructive alternatives to traditional rewards to have on hand.

Overall, I enjoyed working with the kids in the Extended Day even more than I expected. Towards the end of the quarter when I had a lot more stress at home and at school, coming to UDA became an escape for me. I got to know the kids' faces and personalities, and they would make me laugh and forget about everything else that was bothering me. I almost always left UDA feeling better than I did coming in. I am also very grateful that I had the privilege to work with Jen and an enthusiastic group of undergrads; everyone contributed so much to the program, and Jen was very encouraging and supportive of us and our lesson plans.