Cultural Contexts: Getting To Know Your Placement Activity

"Knowing the school and classroom culture where you will be student teaching will give you insight into how to make your lessons relevant, what kind of assessments to use, a possible action research topic and what kinds of actions will be valued by the school and classroom community." Becoming a Student Teacher Action Researcher p.50

Context
In the Consumers of Research course, you started exploring Action Research as a process for developing as an inquiry-based practitioner. It was proposed that critical to this journey are understanding the influences of the *Cultural Contexts* of your school setting, as well as engaging in *Self-Study* to probe how your values, beliefs, and past experiences influence your choices & interpretation. You were asked to keep a teacher notebook as a place for processing your learning, constructing meaning, organizing your thoughts and observations, and noting any critical questions arising from your studies [for a review see Ch1 BTAR].
In the Ed Psych course you explored the concept of constructivism, the significance of community building, and the importance of knowing your students as a foundation for designing relevant and motivating learning experiences. This semester marks the beginning of the school year, with excited new students in both of your placements. The following activity will build on previous work and assist in deepening your knowledge and understanding of your placement community. It will also establish a solid foundation upon which to more deeply know your students and prepare you for student teaching.

Please select one of your placements, complete the following 3 parts for this activity, self-evaluate your work, and then bring your work to class for discussing in small groups. At the end of the small group work you will be asked to hand in your materials.

Part I. Exploring the Broader Community & School Culture
Take a few minutes to walk or drive around your school's community.

What kind of services and resources are available to the broader community? [e.g., library, community center, parks: play/skateboard areas or other recreational facilities]
What are your general observations about the area? [e.g. SES, predominant culture, businesses, etc.]
Are there any other interesting or noteworthy features about the community that might help you better understand the school or its students?

Next, take time to explore the school building. Look at how it is laid out, decorated, the kind of information and student work that is posted on the walls, etc. As you tour the school, you may also want to collect any documentation that will be useful for Part III: Analyzing School Documents

What did you observe.?
What are some examples you would use to describe the school culture?
In what ways does the school support/build community? What did you notice about the staff, teachers or children you see in the hallways?
How would you characterize the community that the school is working to build?

Part II. Getting to Know Your Classroom Culture [refer to BTAR pg 50/53]

Part III. Analyzing School Documents [refer to BTAR pg 57/58]

A Note about Collecting Your Data:

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Do not limit your data collection to simply note-taking; include any visuals such as photos, additional documentation, visuals, illustrations, or other media to further enrich and broaden your dataset. The richer your dataset the more you will have to draw on in your analyses, and the more you will learn. These data may also be useful later on in any communications, materials, or presentations you will be creating for parents, activities, or the program.

Evaluation

Once you have completed the assignment, please evaluate your work using the following scoring rubric and provide a rationale for your scores below.

Criteria	5	3	1
Thoroughness	All elements in the activity are addressed. All questions are answered with at least 2 sentences about each. Information includes several supporting details and/or examples.	All elements in the activity are addressed. Most questions are answered with at least 2 sentences about each. Information includes 1-2 supporting details and/or examples.	All elements in the activity are addressed. Most questions are answered with 1 sentence. No supporting details and/or examples are included.
Data Collection	Includes a rich dataset: Text sources [observation notes + other documents] as well as 2 or more alternate data sources [photos, chart, visual, multimedia, etc.].	Dataset consists of Text sources [observation notes + other documents] with at least 2 alternate data sources [photos, chart, visual, multimedia, etc.].	Dataset consists primarily of Text sources [observation notes + other documents] and 1 alternate data source [photos, chart, visual, etc].
Synthesis	Provides an insightful analysis of the data findings. Identifies patterns or themes emerging across the datasets collected for all the elements of the activity [Community, School, Classroom, Mentor interview & School documents].	Provides an insightful analysis of the data findings. Identifies patterns or themes emerging across the datasets for 3-4 elements of the activity.	Provides an analysis of the data findings. Identifies patterns or themes emerging across the datasets for at least 2 elements of the activity
Deconstruction	Considers how your own assumptions, beliefs and framework for teaching & learning influences your interpretation of the data. Discusses how data findings fit with your own personal beliefs and philosophy. Identifies several areas and/or questions for further study.	Considers either: a) How your own assumptions, beliefs and framework for teaching & learning influences your interpretation of the data; or b) Discusses how data findings fit with your own personal beliefs, philosophy. Identifies at least 2 areas and/or questions for further study.	Minimal attempt is made to consider how your own assumptions and beliefs fit with the data findings or influenced the interpretation of the data. Identifies at least 1 area and/or question for further study.
Organization	Assignment is thoughtfully written. Information is very organized with well-constructed paragraphs and subheadings.	Information is well organized with well-constructed paragraphs and subheadings.	Information is organized, but paragraphs are not well-constructed.

Rationale for scores:

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