

Expanding Educational Methods for Students and Staff: Exploring Non-traditional Methods

Honors Thesis Portfolio

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This portfolio is an extension of the written thesis I completed for the Sociology Concentration in Human Services titled, "Expanding Educational Methods for Students and Staff: Exploring Non-traditional Methods". It is a compilation of field notes, interviews, and reflections all related to expanding my research about the education system in place, non-traditional methods of education, and understanding how human services work fits into education. The field notes are thoughts, ideas, reactions, and reflections based off of various readings and personal experiences in classes or in the field. The interviews and reflections are from meetings with various human services professionals throughout the course of this semester and are comprised of the answers to the interview questions and personal reflections about each interview experience. The reference list includes all the additional books I read for the extension of my thesis and some books listed do not have field notes to accompany them, but are still relevant to the thesis.

**Field Notes September 10, 2019***Savage Inequalities* (1992, Kozol)

- 930 children to one counselor
  - How could one-person even learn all these names, sets the position up for failure. Unrealistic to think that someone in this position can address the needs of all these children, or even half of them. Fails both the students and counselor because the job is unattainable.
- Schools with no windows
  - How can children be expected to learn if they are in such poor learning environments.
- The idea that poor schools = poor investments in the future
  - Investing in children based on race and socioeconomic status reinforces the structural issues in society like racism and poverty. Cannot expect a better future for these children if we do not change their present environments.

*Punished by Rewards* (1993, Kohn)

- Praise is used for feedback on a performance or to manipulate behavior.
  - How even with the best intentions' phrases like "great work" and "I'm proud of you for \_\_\_" can be detrimental to children and set them up for future need or praise in order to do something.
- Praise needs to include self-determination and intrinsic motivation!!
- Children do not need rewards to learn, they are curious and explorative all on their own

- I am reminded of this constantly in my work experience with children, but I too fall into using common strategies of rewards and praises. Children are independent beings who are eventually trained into needing rewards or grades or praise for their work in order to complete such work or feel accomplished. Rewarding them takes away the satisfaction of completing the task itself.
- “Mastery V. ability”, “learning V. performance”, “task V. ego” (p. 155)
  - How we can receive mastery of an assignment but not actually take anything away from it. For example, receiving mastery level grades in a foreign language class but not being able to use that language in the future. I do not remember the information because I was trained to memorize what was going to be tested. I did not learn about the language in an immersive and meaningful way.
- Being an average student, and how grades have trained me to think I always need an “A” or my work is not good enough.
- I have lost creativity; in expressive arts we were instructed to scribble our feelings on 5 different pages and I struggled with letting go to use those 5 pages. I immediately thought this was a waste of such nice art paper, as I have been trained to think. I had to work really hard to let go, and use the supplies in ways I never have in my education before.

**Summary & Reflection 1: Interview with Meri Lederer**

1) What is your educational background?

- Bachelor's degree in philosophy
- Master's in social work
- Educational Administration Certification
- An almost complete MBA

Most of these programs from NYU

2) What population do you work with?

Meri works with elementary students in grades three through five.

3) Do you feel your roles as a Social Worker is restricted within the current education system?

There is a teaching model and a therapeutic model of social work, but they both seem to integrate within the school system here. At Lenape, there is no guidance counselor but there is a school psychologist, so roles intertwine. As the social worker I oversee a peer mediation program and deliver mental health curriculum to each classroom throughout the school year.

4) What would you change about your job description if you could change something?

I would add an additional school social worker as one is not enough. Now there are more students with diagnoses and I need to find the time to meet with all of them. If I could change something, I would change the ways we have to report data. Data is more quantitative and subjective, and collecting this type of data comes with a cost. If I am to report things, I could be losing time on building relationships with the children, which is my job.

5) How applicable, if you think they are, are non-traditional methods of education such as the

Montessori Method and Reggio Emilia Approach to current educational methods?

There are places for alternative educational models, education is fluid so nothing should be off the table. For example, Common Core standards are enforced here but the ways in which teachers meet these standards are not scripted and up to each individual. Lenape follows a Responsive Classroom model which focuses on the affect of education, community building, and allowing for the students to set rules. Another example has been the way reading is being taught now through an intentional reading model placing more emphasis on phonetics.

6) Do you have a critical thinker or theorist whose ideas you align with or have inspired you?

There are many thinkers I relate with such as early philosophers, developmental psychologists, and modern activists. One specific example is Alice Walker.

7) What are some of the issues you face daily within your profession?

Everything, children with anxiety, autism spectrum disorders, and ADHD. Anxiety has seen a great increase recently. Crisis Intervention is another area of specialty that I am in the process of training teachers in. Racism and bullying are also other daily problems.

8) What are some of the solutions you have in place to address these issues?

Currently there is a Racial Equity Initiative within the school to address issues of race and racism, staff complete professional development and cultural proficiency trainings. DASA policies about bullying and harassment are regularly enforced within the school, but there is a fine line with it; when a file is registered it can stay on a child's record until the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, sometimes kids are not trying to bully or harass it is just them learning social behavior and figuring out what is appropriate/not appropriate. Parent involvement is high within the school, but also creates a fine line between what parents want and what the school wants. Technology is also another issue that we monitor, trying to figure out the pros and cons and the amount of

screen time kids are being exposed too and how that impacts them. Overall to address these issues we have to be constantly educating ourselves, be flexible with the changing world and understand the lack of predictability we have. It's like fixing a plane, you can't alter it once it is in the air, you have to wait until it lands again before changes can be made.

9) How are human rights incorporated into your position/program?

Human rights are the driving force behind social work, this district highly values human rights and works to honor and respect them. As the social worker, I am the conduit for resources, recommending services in the community when appropriate. To target food insecurity, we have a backpack program where we give kids a backpack filled with staple foods and snacks to take home over the weekend to make sure they aren't hungry. February is our largest month for supporting human rights, it is when a lot of the focus is on human rights issues, civil rights and discuss leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. Another way human rights are incorporated is through the responsive classroom model which furthers human rights at the micro level.

### **Reflection:**

Meeting with Meri surprised me in many ways, but has made me so much more excited to meet with the others on our list. Her educational background is so diverse but also relevant to how interdisciplinary the human services and education fields are. While the idea that a school social worker wears many hats while working is not new to me, it was great to see it in action and hear how Meri uses all of her education to assist in her daily work. The way she described a teaching model and therapeutic model to social work really stuck with me and reminded me of methods that combine both of these approaches, like social pedagogy. Her call for more school

social workers also stuck, as I believe it too. One social worker for all children in grades three through five creates a system that is out of proportion and reinforces the model in place where only the kids who need it most see the social worker. Learning about the responsive classroom model that Lenape follows was really enlightening. Lenape was where the summer camp I worked at was held, and to me it looks like every other traditional school building. What I mean by this is that it has lots of classrooms with tables, chairs, and desks all aligned toward a central white board or smartboard projector, there are cubbies for the children's supplies, a large gym and cafeteria and most walls are neutrally painted. This type of educational environment is traditional to see and something I am used to, so it was an interesting experience to learn how this environment is transformed to support the responsive classroom model, just as it had transformed to host summer camp. After taking what Meri described and researching more about responsive classrooms, it was clear to me that alternative methods to education can be incorporated into traditional educational settings. The responsive classroom model was something I only came across briefly in my thesis research, but aims at teaching social and emotional competencies alongside academic competencies. Furthermore, it emphasizes methods that are also present in the Montessori Method, Reggio Emilia Approach and social pedagogy like choice in the classroom, participating in rule setting, community building, social interaction, and both cognitive and academic development. Another answer from the interview that stuck with me was about the issues Meri faces daily and the programs or policies in place to address these issues. She mentioned being flexible in this rapidly changing world we live in, and being able to adjust to the lack of predictability there is today. This is a challenge I too am familiar with from my own experience of working with children. It is clear that the world we live in is very fast paced and fluid, and determining the impacts this leaves on children is a difficult task.

It is even more difficult to predict how the world will be as they continue to age and develop into adults. As I continue this process, I look forward to the new educational methods I may encounter and the different things I can learn from each individual I meet with especially in today's global climate.

Some additional sources I found on responsive classrooms are listed below.

Charney, R. (1992). *Teaching children to care: Management in the responsive classroom*.

Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children. Retrieved from

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED369531.pdf>

Principles & Practices. (n.d) Retrieved September 30, 2019 from

<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/principles-practices/>.

### **Field Notes September 24, 2019**

*Freedom to Learn* (Rodgers & Freiberg, 1994)

- Focusing on why students love school, not just focusing on the negatives or what is wrong with schools
- What students want from schools: trust, respect, being part of a family, teachers to be helpers, responsibility, freedom, care, help when they need it, success, choices. Even with all my research on “bad schools” students still want the same things and even in the worst schools’ educators are doing their best to provide students with these factors.
- Classrooms as places where students are consumers of information versus places where students are produces of information and ideas.

- Silence in schools and the use of noise level charts. The school I work in just created noise level charts placed in every classroom that includes: no talking—quiet/whisper—normal—loud—yelling, where each level is associated with a color to give students times to be at each noise level throughout the day.
- Learning from the neck up versus learning with the whole body. When do we use our whole person to learn and when do we learn from the neck up? Through sitting in a lecture style classroom or from discussion and group work and projects?
- Being a teacher and a learner; this can be useful for students and teachers, as there are lessons to be learned from both sides of this relationship dynamic.
- The qualities that facilitate learning; realness and genuineness or being a real human, valuing acceptance and trust, empathetic understanding and not judging. These are qualities seen in methods I have studied such as The Montessori Method, Reggio Emilia Approach and Social Pedagogy.
- Teaching versus Facilitating, creating a climate where students can be curious. Learning what students' interests are, nurturing creativity.
- Plane metaphor, you can't fix a plane while its in flight, same with education. (Meri mentioned this in her interview as well!)
- Building freedom in the classroom through using problems that are real for students, providing resources, using an instructional continuum and contracts. I felt most free in my learning through classes where I had to design my learning objectives and how I was to be evaluated.
- The idea that teachers don't create the social/economic conditions that students bring with them to school but they can perpetuate them in the classroom.

Based off the first interview, I reflected on what I learned from asking the questions and about what I didn't learn from the answers I received. Going forward I am going to ask for more specifics, such as not only asking someone about any critical thinker/theorist who influenced them but also what that theory is and how they apply it to their work. Furthermore, adding a question about stress and burnout I think can provide a lot of information about the demands of these types of jobs and the support these individuals need to work.

### **Summary & Reflection 2: Interview with Eileen Ploetz**

- 1) What is your educational background?

Bachelor's in Sociology from Le Moyne, MSW from Albany with a macro system focus.

Currently has LMSW, might go for the C soon.

- 2) What populations do you work with?

Arlington School District, Poughkeepsie area population for Overlook primary/La Grange secondary school aged students. There is a lot of socioeconomic diversity among students, working with different races/ethnicities, and students in poverty. Students are separated in primary and secondary schools then merge all into high school creating for a lot of diversity there.

- 3) Do you feel that your role as a Social Worker is restricted within the current system?

The ability to do my job is restricted because of how at Overlook School she is the only social worker, while at the La Grange School there is another social worker. The school

psychologist takes on some of her roles on the days she is not at Overlook. IEP caseload takes up about 75% of her time, which leaves less time to work with the students in crisis.

- 4) What would you change about your job description if you could change something?

She would change the frequency of doing group sessions with students. Groups only benefit the students with diagnoses or social skills issues, and those that do not need assistance in those areas are put into these groups because of scheduling. In other words, students are grouped together so that it looks as if she's meeting with more kids throughout the day, but they aren't necessarily getting the services they need through groups. The use of restraints is also something she would change, having to physically restrain students is an uncomfortable part of the job here. It is used to keep others and the student safe, but is not easily done.

- 5) How applicable are non-traditional methods of education to current methods?

They are applicable, but right now it is hard to apply them because of the number of students that need services. There are 13 social workers within the district, enough in the high school to have one for each grade level. Mindfulness is something that is being used in classrooms

- 6) Do you have a critical thinker/theorist whose ideas you align with or inspire you, and what is the philosophy?

Solution focused therapy, where 5 minutes of time is devoted to identifying the problem and the other 55 minutes of the session is devoted to solving the problem. Helping students to think through steps of possible solutions and outcomes.

- 7) What are some of the issues you face daily?

Homelessness, hunger and lack of resources. Mental health and depression, and lack of Mental Health services, having to be a sort of therapist to students because of lack of services. Resource distribution is another issue that impacts students and services—especially the differences among the schools in Arlington and Poughkeepsie, while the whole district is well off resources are not always distributed evenly among schools.

8) What are some solutions in place to address these issues?

Finding transportation for homeless students. There is a weekend backpack program to send students home with food, a food pantry, clothing closet, and resources to find students eye glasses. Implementing tiered interventions (RTI) and using mindfulness in these interventions and teaching basic coping skills.

9) How are human rights incorporated into your program/profession?

Basic human rights are upheld in working to do what is best for child. Due to the interesting time we live in and ages of students (some young some middle school) trying to allow them to be autonomous in processes, giving them self-determination, explaining their IEP's to them and treating them as humans. They are stripped of human rights in some ways when restraints are used against students.

10) How do you deal with stress and burnout?

Mindfulness, setting time to decompress and process the day as soon as I get home from work, venting to loved ones, and planning something to look forward to on weekends or days off to be able to think about on the hard days.

**Reflection:**

It was very exciting to meet with Eileen in this way and see her in a professional role. While she is new to the field, I felt that she was very confident and seemed comfortable in her role as a school social worker already. After explaining her schedule to me of switching back and forth between the schools, I was quite shocked about how she made it work. Being in an elementary school Monday and Tuesday and then switching to a middle school Wednesday through Friday seems very overwhelming to me, as the populations can vary greatly. However, she explained that originally, they had wanted her to alternate schools every other day, but she let them know that would not be effective for the students or herself. I also had no idea how the use of groups could be framed to make it appear that she was meeting with more kids in less time, as that looks efficient to outsiders but like she explained does not help each individual student. Another aspect of her job I was surprised by was the use of restraint. While I know that this happens in schools, it is hard to talk about and hear how restraining students is done.

Solution focused therapy was something I found very interesting. Designating time to first identify and then solve problems with students seems to be an impactful way of working with them. This method allows them to figure out what their problem is but also allows them to be part of creating the solution in their own terms. Furthermore, since it provides students with autonomy in solution making it can be modified to fit all the needs of the diverse students she works with. I was very surprised to hear about the problem of homelessness within the Arlington school district, as I have come to know it as one of the rich districts in the area. Eileen made it clear that the district is well off, but because it is so large and spread out the Poughkeepsie area schools have to face different issues than those in Arlington. It was great to hear how many

resources are available to students in this district, even with issues of resource distribution, having options can make or break a situation for a student.

I am glad that I made my questions more discrete or thorough for this interview, as I feel that I was able to understand more about Eileen's educational background and what philosophies she uses. Furthermore, asking about stress and burnout is helpful to see how others cope, but also to potentially learn new ways of coping for myself. Another commonality I found from Meri's interview and Eileen's was the implementation of a backpack program to send students facing food insecurity home with food over the weekends. While that is a small solution to a large problem, it is comforting to know that schools are aware and trying to help these students. It was also great to see how the call for more school social workers was common for both Meri Lederer and Eileen, and I feel that this need will continue across my interviews. Furthermore, I am excited to learn about what the call for more social workers means for schools and current educational policy. I wonder if it would be helpful for me to interview other social workers from this district to learn more about the differences in demographics and to visit a school in the district, as Eileen and I met on our own time while she was not at work.

### **Summary & Reflection 3: Rich Silverman**

1) What is your educational background?

BA in psychology and education, MSW from Hunter College, LCSWR. Was a CAE, alcoholism counselor for kids for 2 years.

2) What populations do you work with?

KidsPeace is for troubled youth in foster care, they have experienced some type of trauma and PTSD is common among them. In his private practice he sees all populations of participants.

- 3) Do you feel that your role as a Social Worker is restricted within the current system?

Not at KidsPeace, he has free range in services as only the counties they work with set regulations for working with the children. Prior to working at KidsPeace, he worked at Ulster County Mental Health in the Children and Family Unit, where he felt a lot more restrictions or regulations from the county.

- 4) What would you change about your job description if you could change something?

Nothing currently, he feels he has the freedom to do his work.

- 5) How applicable are non-traditional methods of education to current methods?

Absolutely applicable, he feels that nontraditional educational methods have to be available to everyone, as traditional public schooling does not work for everyone. He feels that alternative methods would be very beneficial to KidsPeace kids. Furthermore, Rich stated that an atmosphere of learning needs to be created where each and every kid feels confident to learn. Something KidsPeace is using and could be applicable to education is mindfulness.

- 6) Do you have a critical thinker/theorist whose ideas you align with or inspire you, and what is the philosophy?

Irvin Yalom, a youth/group advocate.

Solution Oriented therapy. As a therapist you have to collaboratively seek out problems and exceptions to them.

- 7) What are some of the issues you face daily?

Working with children who struggle with facing up to their own behavior and holding themselves accountable. Behavioral and cognitive changes throughout their time with KidsPeace are also issues to work with.

8) What are some solutions in place to address these issues?

Clinical Therapy. Case management; which is the basic form of therapy work in the field.

Case manager provide the basic forms of clinical therapy in their work with the KidsPeace kids and families.

The setting/environment of KidsPeace also helps staff and clients work to address these issues. There is a lot of team support and staff operates as a family in some ways.

9) How are human rights incorporated into your program/profession?

The Declaration of Client Rights. As an individual clinician; allowing children to do what they want in this process, treating them as individual human beings. Finding balance among clinician/client line to set develop goals, working independently but together, incorporating the kids own ideas into things. Advocacy is also a large human rights part of the job through attending CSE meetings. Public schools can be very restricting, and not meet the needs of the KidsPeace kids. They have options in place to step in if the school cannot, they work with an organization that is familiar with special education and education law that will come to these meetings to advocate for their kids.

10) How do you deal with stress and burnout?

I believe that every client I have ever come into contact with and myself are the same. We are humans. This mindset helps prevent burnout. He also effectively detaches himself from work, and is able to not bring his work home with him, which comes with experience.

**Reflection:**

Having the opportunity to meet with Rich and get a perspective that is not right in the education field was super informative. I am also glad that I was able to hear from another person at KidsPeace, as I am familiar with the organization because of my friendship with Sonya (another former CHS student), but it was great to hear about another aspect of their services. Rich is almost retired so it was also very interesting to hear his experiences over his long career. The population of KidsPeace is very specific, but these kids are still part of larger society so it was interesting to hear about what the agency does to ensure these kids are part of the bigger picture. It was so refreshing to hear that Rich did not feel restricted at all in his ability to work with KidsPeace. This was the first interview where somebody had nothing that they felt restricted by or would change about their job; which I think is a highlight to KidsPeace and the work that they do.

His mention of Solution Oriented therapy, which he thought was outdated was also insightful because Eileen is using the same basic method. This was a nice connection as this method is clearly transferable across the human services and education field. This is another method I would love to learn more about as I continue my research process and interviews. Irvin Yalom, the theorist he identified is also someone whose work I would like to become more familiar with. From a basic search, I found that he is a professor of psychiatry and I would love to learn more about the counseling skills in his books and how applicable they are.

While Rich does not always directly intersect with the education system through KidsPeace, it was clear that the interactions they do have through CSE and other meetings was profound. While I have never attended a CSE meeting, I have often subbed for teachers who

attend them for the students in their class. At the school I work in, CSE meeting days are stressful and long for classroom teachers, special ed teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, and office staff. The schedule of these meetings almost always runs late, leaving less and less time for each consecutive meeting after the first. These meetings are crucial to attend to advocate for students, and the organization he mentioned that works with agencies to help schools work to meet the needs of kids was awesome to learn about (he forgot the name, but is trying to find their contact info for me). Advocacy is also a huge part of the human rights aspect of his work, so it was great to see the intersection of social work, education, and human rights. Again, adding the question about stress and burnout is so helpful, and I am glad to be learning about the different way's individuals in the field work through these.

#### **Field Notes October 22, 2019**

Finished reading Sex Object, for Education of Self and have really been thinking about the intersectionality of gender and race in schools and different educational methods. During the interview with Rich, I not only heard his answers to the questions I asked but he would also turn them around and ask me what I thought too. This was refreshing and, in some ways, challenging because I have all this information but I am still somewhat unsure of what I'm going to do with it. I know I will take all of this with me into my future education and career plans, but will it also bring a call to action? If I want to implement changes in the education system so I start at the micro level and change classrooms and then work up? Or do I start at the macro level and change educational policy to bring change down the system? Is there a right or wrong way?

#### **Summary & Reflection 4: Lizabeth Madara**

- 1) What is your educational background?

Psych & environmental science undergrad from Plattsburgh. MSW from Albany. Is a certified LCSW.

- 2) What populations do you work with?

9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students, special education and regular education students. Poughkeepsie high school has 1,150 students.

- 3) Do you feel that your role as a Social Worker is restricted within the current system?

Only that there are not enough social workers, what I can do in my job I am not restricted.

- 4) What would you change about your job description if you could change something?

Having 2 social workers; one for all special education/IEP's and one for prevention and crisis management.

- 5) How applicable are non-traditional methods of education to current methods?

She understands how these methods can be beneficial, but they are normally only seen and implemented in affluent places, so are not applicable or accessible to students in Poughkeepsie. She called for more vocational education for students in Poughkeepsie, as the program they have is very small and is not open to many students. She feels that vocational training would be a great alternative to many students there.

- 6) Do you have a critical thinker/theorist whose ideas you align with or inspire you, and what is the philosophy?

Nobody specific, but she feels that the most important work she does is resilience building. Through a person in environment perspective, these students all face issues inside and outside of school and building resilience is the way to help them.

7) What are some of the issues you face daily?

Peer conflicts, poverty and homelessness, truancy, shortages of teachers, security, and administration. Furthermore, psychiatric problems, depression and suicide, gangs and social pressures, family issues, and working with the highly taxed mental health services in the area. More kids are also recognizing anxiety and its impacts.

8) What are some solutions in place to address these issues?

PBIS, tiered interventions, there is a problem with skipping tiers. More needs to be done to meet the needs at the basic level, then up each tier. In ELA classrooms she constructs programs around mental health and wellness and resiliency. Her ideal program would be that she is able to have 4-5 sessions for all classes, but now is only able to have 1 session. She works on helping students to understand ACES, trauma, emotional and social development, mental health, resiliency, and protective factors.

9) How are human rights incorporated into your program/profession?

Advocacy is a huge part, especially since the students here have less access to quality healthcare, mental health services, and daycare. The lack of affluence equates to less opportunities here. Human rights are not necessarily being upheld, so advocacy is the biggest part in working to uphold them.

10) How do you deal with stress and burnout?

Stress and burnout come and go with the alignment of the stars. Having an intern helps her a lot, it is refreshing to be able to have them experience things for the first time with her guidance and is helpful with the workload. Humor among coworkers is also effective in helping them deal with the job. She mentioned that she has a hard time separating work and home, and that most of her students have her phone number and will call or text her outside of school when they need something. Furthermore, she invests her own money into her office and making that space safe for her students (tending to the space), she recently added a high-top table and stools to sit at as a change of scenery for the students, and change the layout and decorations in the office.

### **Reflection:**

I have never been to Poughkeepsie high school before, and it was definitely an eye-opening experience. I felt very aware of my whiteness as I walked towards the school, and had never seen a school with so much uniformed security. As soon as I entered and was checking in with the main guard, a fight broke out down the hall and students, teachers, and more security guards went running towards it, as the man in front of me was speaking into the audio system “code red”. I have never experienced anything like that in my schooling before and my privilege was now at the forefront of my mind. While waiting outside Lizabeth’s office, I noticed security guards constantly asking students where they were supposed to be, where their hall pass was, and I could not believe that the students needed to ask for bathrooms to be unlocked in order to use them. The more I think about what the school environment looked like and how the students were treated, the more it reminded me of places where people go to get punished like a prison. This sounds dramatic to me when I type it out, but I don’t understand how these students are able

to learn in this manner, which might be another example of my privilege and something I would love to discuss with you.

The call for more school social workers was clear again here, and this will now become a more prevalent theme in my research and presentation. Lizabeth is very open and honest, and when discussing nontraditional education with her, she prefaced her answer with “I mean no offense but...” which I found very enlightening. I felt no disrespect but was again reminded of my privilege and how she is right that these kids don’t have the access to opportunities for alternative education. This is something I want to research more, as opportunity and access do truly impact education. Resiliency training was also something I loved learning about in this interview. There is clearly a need to integrate human services methods of resilience building into the education system and into classrooms. What I am finding is that the methods mentioned in my interviews are not necessarily whole nontraditional educational methods where the system is flipped, but smaller methods focused on emotional/social/cognitive development and not just academic development or progress. I think this is where I might steer my research now, to the methods that social workers and others are using within this system to help meet the needs of students, and how they can be expanded on.

### **Field Notes October 21, 2019**

The reflection I wrote about going to Poughkeepsie High School has still been resonating with me, especially as I have started the unit on race and racism in Education of Self. We have started reading *The Hate You Give*, and also watched the documentary *The 13<sup>th</sup>*, and I have learned a lot while also experiencing a lot of feelings. These experiences have made me want to

check in on my privilege and find out how to use it in ways that call attention to oppressed voices. I have realized that it is still hard for me to wrap my head around of the idea of white privilege itself. What I mean by this, is that I cannot understand how people have determined someone's worth by the color of their skin, as I work hard to make sure I determine worth by people's character. Furthermore, the fact that systems in our society have been structured around the color of people's skin color for hundreds of years still shocks me. However, I also know that I am not colorblind and my experience at Poughkeepsie high school shows this. I want to be able to learn more about what to do with my privilege and take a stand against racism beyond just being against it. Furthermore, these experiences lead me to wonder how race/racism will evolve as I continue my education and experience in the field, and how society is going to react with these changes. I look forward to learning more about myself in this sense, and how I can be more active in the fight against racism.

### **Summary & Reflection 5: Bri Kane**

- 1) What is your educational background?

BA from New Paltz through CHS, masters in school counseling from New Paltz.

- 2) What populations do you work with?

K-4 students, mostly white some Hispanic, little diversity in Pawling School. Is available to meet with all students, through tiered interventions, focuses on prevention and response. With this age group most of the work is done through play and talk therapies.

- 3) Do you feel that your role as a school counselor is restricted within the current education system?

Yes, in regards to needing another school counselor. Follows the American School Counselor Association comprehensive model, this becomes challenging with a caseload of around 400 students as the model is designed for no more than 250 students.

- 4) What would you change about your job description if you could change something?

About the description itself nothing, but about the actual job she calls for more mental health support. In the tiered interventions, there is too much of a responsive approach from the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier instead of a preventative one from the 1<sup>st</sup> two tiers.

- 5) How applicable are non-traditional methods of education such as the Montessori Method, and Reggio Emilia Approach to current educational methods?

She was not too familiar with these models of education, but believes that education is always changing. Social and Emotional Learning need to be incorporated, through the media there has been a shift to highlight social/emotional learning. Mindfulness is important and implemented. Through tier 1 interventions she is going into classrooms and having classes come into her office to discuss prevention.

- 6) Do you have a critical thinker or theorist, such as Paolo Freire or John Dewey, whose ideas you align with or have inspired you?

Sociology shaped her viewpoint as a human and how she thinks about the world. Carl Rogers is her main critical thinker and she aligns with his humanistic perspective and unconditional positive regard. She believes that even students at 5 years old know how to self-regulate and solve problems, giving them choices and allowing them to think for themselves.

- 7) What are some of the issues you face daily within your profession?

Bureaucracy and lack of support from others within the school, she feels that she has nobody to turn to, the teachers aren't trained in counseling methods, but her commitment to the job is what keeps her going. In regards to the students, there is a lot of domestic violence and issues between parents that impact the students. There is also a lot of anxiety and trauma.

- 8) What are some of the solutions you have in place to address these issues?

Using the ASCA model, within tiered interventions, most of the work is in tier 2; which is scheduled counseling. She meets with these kids because of data from discipline and conflict resolution, or through her family changes group. She also holds a group for girls to build self-esteem and a group to build social skills. Bri also gathers data on referrals and why kids were sent to her and to gain understanding about their families. She also makes time to meet with about 30 students who she sees as at risk; because of their attendance, status as a new student, their gender identity, or if they have siblings with high needs, and she'll pull them in to have an informal lunch with her and get to know her. She also created a self-referral program where kids can drop a note in a mailbox on her door, and ask questions or to meet with her. She uses this as a way to try and normalize talking about problems.

- 9) How are human rights incorporated into your position/program?

She used to implement a unit on diversity in classrooms, but that had to get cut in order for her to meet with students. She believes that teachers incorporate human rights in small ways in their curriculum through having debates and accountable talk, and they

have a unit on migrant rights. Her main human rights work is through advocacy and she said she will get what her students need.

10) How do you deal with stress and burnout?

She knows that she puts all her energy into helping the students, and will not stop until she gets what they need. However, she is also aware of how digging deep into one student's needs takes energy away from her helping other students. The volume and content of what she hears impacts stress and burnout significantly. Bri was adamant about setting boundaries and leaving work at work. In terms of selfcare, she tries to build a strong network to lean on, does CrossFit, and goes to a monastery on the weekends. Furthermore, she advocated for mental health first, and admits that she goes to therapy and takes mental health days when she needs them. Having summers off is a great time for her to restart, and she said that when something you do to take care of yourself becomes stale you have to find something else.

### **Reflection:**

This interview was by far the most rewarding for me. Bri has given me the reassurance that pursuing a career as a school counselor is exactly what I want to be doing. The Pawling Elementary School reminded me of my own school at home, but just a bit more rural. I was amazed that Bri has her own full-sized classroom as an office, as she is the first person, I met with who doesn't just have a small office with a table and chairs. Her classroom is brightly colored has carpets to sit on, bean bags, small round tables to sit at, and her own desk as well. She has whiteboards, and computers, and shelves of supplies. This to me was amazing because it

gives her and the students options as to how they want to interact. Furthermore, I think that her office matching the layout of other classrooms lessens the stigma around meeting with her. It was so easy to talk with Bri, and the twenty-minute interview quickly turned into an hour-long conversation about everything. She shared her experience in the CHS and also in the master's program at New Paltz and gave me a lot of information about the application process and the realities of grad school.

What surprised me most about meeting with her, was her answer about the lack of support within the school bureaucracy. It was hard for me to hear how little she is supported within the school and how as the only school counselor there is a lot of weight on her shoulders. This is hard for me to picture, as the school I work in has created a very supportive environment for the school counselor and social worker, but this is a reminder that every school is different. Furthermore, she mentioned how this lack of support is not just from teachers, but from administrators as well. Her example related to staff development days and how the staff trainings are all about teaching, not about mental health services but she as a counselor and not a teacher still has to sit through them. This brought me to my thesis and how in my research I called for teachers to get access to more mental health and human services training so that they can also help with prevention services and it does not all fall on the school counselor.

I was excited when she mentioned Carl Rogers, as I am becoming a bit more familiar with his work through expressive arts this semester. While I am reading a book by his daughter Natalie Rodgers, she heavily references her father's work and his methods such as the humanistic perspective, unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence. Some of these methods were also mentioned in the CHS when Kat led counseling skills, so I was glad that I am familiar with real world counseling methods. Bri mentioned how his work is heavily referenced

in the counseling profession, and I am glad that I am getting of glimpse of it in my undergraduate education. Furthermore, this excites me for the future and what I will learn in grad school.

Her initiative to create all these different groups such as the changing families one, girls' self-esteem and social skills was very inspiring to me. While in other interviews some issues with group work were mentioned, it was clear that Bri is able to groups in meaningful ways and build connections among students. Furthermore, this is exactly what I wanted to see and learn about. What I mean is that Bri was connecting students beyond scheduled one-on-one meetings and finding ways to get them to support one another. I believe that these types of programs are great examples of expanding the school counselor's role and normalizing talking about issues. Her self-referral program was also something that I found so inspiring. This relates back to how I now feel so confident about becoming a school counselor and about what this research is teaching me. In other words, this meeting aligned with what I am finding in the interview research, that while larger scale non-traditional methods of education may be successful there are other smaller scale methods that can be implemented into schools right now. I am so glad to have met with Bri and learn from her about becoming a school counselor.

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