**Stand Back and Look at the World**

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***The World of my Students…***

The capital city of Lincoln, Nebraska has a growing population of 265,404. Between the 2000 and 2012 census, the population of Lincoln increased 17.7% from 225,581. Of the residents living in Lincoln, 82.8% are White, 6.4% are Hispanic, 3.9% are Black, 3.9% are Asian, 2.5% have two or more races, 0.5% are American Indian, and 0.8% are Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (Lincoln, NE Profile, 2014).

Over the recent years Lincoln has gained attention by topping the Center for Disease Control list of the healthiest U.S. cities in 2008 (WebMD, 2008), and then was rated number one on Gallup-Heathway’s list of “Happiest and Healthiest” cities in 2013 (Gallup Healthways, 2013). In the 1970’s, Lincoln was labeled as a refugee-friendly city by the U.S. Government due to its stable economy, educational institutions, and size.

Eastridge Elementary School sits in an established neighborhood located southwest of 70th and O streets, behind the Saint Elizabeth Hospital and just South of the Gateway Mall in Lincoln, Nebraska. This is home to my current students. The school’s first year was in 1954 and at that time the present building did not exist and classes were held in five houses referred to as cottages. The present building was built in 1955 and opened its doors to students that Fall. During that first phase of the building project it included eight classrooms, an office area, and a multipurpose room on the west end of the building. In 1956, the second phase of the building project took place on the east end of the building and included six classrooms, a media center, and an auditorium. In 2000, the gym, art, and music rooms were added on the west side of the building. In the sixty years that Eastridge has been educating children, there have been nine principals (Eastridge Staff Handbook, 2014).

Eastridge Elementary School educated 272 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade during the 2013 - 2014 school year. Over the past 15 years, Eastridge Elementary student enrollment has been between 222 and 294 students. Recent demographic data from the 2013 – 2014 school year shows that 80% of the students attending Eastridge Elementary School are white. Hispanic students make up 9% of the population while 3% are black or African American. The remaining races and ethnicities that are represented at Eastridge Elementary School include 4% of students who are two or more races, 2% who are Asian, and 2% who are American Indian/Alaskan Native (2013-2014 State of the Schools Report).

The exceptionalities of students who receive additional services and programing found among the students at Eastridge Elementary School during the 2013 – 2014 school year include 24.8% in Special Education, 1% in the English Language Learner (ELL) program, and 5.1% who take part in the differentiated instruction for High Ability Learners. The percentage of students who receive Special Education services at Eastridge Elementary School was 10.7% higher than the district average of 14.06%.

During the 2013 – 2014 school year, the School Improvement (SIP) team identified reading vocabulary and math problem solving as areas of weakness among the majority of students attending Eastridge Elementary. According to these findings, school-wide goals were created to increase student achievement with reading vocabulary and math problem solving.

At the center of the school culture found at Eastridge Elementary is the school’s rules that state, be respectful, be responsible, and be safe. The rules demonstrate the expectations for creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

Rituals are procedures or routines infused with deeper meaning. Each morning begins with a school-wide announcement over the intercom and is led by a fifth grade student. The fifth grader leads the rest of the school in reciting the pledge of allegiance and school chant. The school chant is in a call and response form which states, “Why are we here?... To learn! What works?...Effort! What will we give?... 100%!”. The fifth grade student then poses a discussion question that is based on their school wide Behavior Intervention and Support Team (BIST) program and each classroom spends time responding before beginning their day. Throughout the week, students may be caught being respectful, responsible, or safe and will be given a golden ticket. When students receive a golden ticket they write their name on it and add it to their classroom collection of golden tickets. On Fridays, each classroom teacher will draw a name from the collection and that student’s name will be announced over the intercom for recognition of being an outstanding citizen in the school.

Traditions, or annual events with a significant history, are an important part of Eastridge Elementary School. Each school year begins with a “back to school” night where students and their families visit their classrooms, meet their teachers, and partake in a barbeque. Other traditions include the annual bike rodeo, family wellness night in January, family fun night, and family movie nights in the gymnasium.

Ceremonies at Eastridge Elementary School are sanctioned ways the school celebrates success, communicates their values, and recognizes special contributions of students and staff. Each quarter ends with an assembly focused on celebrating the success of students. A student is chosen from each classroom as someone who has displayed behavior, attitude, and performance worth recognition. Students are recognized by their teacher with a certificate that describes their outstanding qualities and an Eastridge Eagles t-shirt. Their parents are also invited to attend the quarterly assembly.

At the end of the school year, all students gather together in the gymnasium for an assembly to celebrate the highlights from the year through awards and recognition. For the closing of the ceremony, the staff and students watch a video created with music and pictures taken throughout the year. The fifth grade class then marches around the gym while receiving a standing ovation from their teachers and younger peers.

Eastridge Elementary School has an active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) that has had a positive impact on the school culture and student learning through large community involvement and teacher support. The PTO has raised funds and facilitated programs that support the staff and families of Eastridge Elementary. The organization has provided donations, equipment, support, and supplies for teachers and classrooms, and offers after-school clubs. The PTO president, who is also the art and technology teacher at Eastridge Elementary, reported that there were between seventy-five and one hundred active members during the 2013 – 2014 school year.

Throughout the list of rituals, traditions, and ceremonies found at Eastridge Elementary, several of them are rooted with the purpose of positively impacting students and their learning. The impact is not only coming from teachers and administrators but also from the strong PTO involvement and school community as it works to support the school in a variety of ways. Students and their learning are also impacted through the ceremonies that bring about a sense of community, Eastridge pride, and recognition of success.

***How does their world compare to that of other students?***

I had the privilege of interviewing a colleague who is currently teaching at West Lincoln Elementary. West Lincoln Elementary is the oldest elementary school site in Lincoln, Nebraska. A school has been in its location for over 130 years. The West Lincoln neighborhood consists of mobile home communities, apartments and single-family homes. A portion of West Lincoln’s attendance area is industrial and unused land. The locations and environments of the two schools create a large difference between them. Eastridge is located in a very central place, surrounded by a variety of businesses and established housing developments.

West Lincoln Elementary served 464 students during the 2013-2014 school year in preschool through 5th grade, serving approximately 192 more students than Eastridge Elementary. Recent demographic data from the 2013–2014 school year shows that 45% of the student population is Hispanic, 35% is white, and 10% are Black or African American. West Lincoln has 5% of students that are 2 or more races, 4% that are Asian, and 1% that who are American Indian/Alaskan Natives (2013 -2014 State of the Schools Report). According to this data, the student populations of the two schools are significantly different. The largest population at West Lincoln Elementary is made up of Hispanic students (45%), while the largest population at Eastridge Elementary is white (80%).

West Lincoln Elementary serves a large population of students who are English Language Learners (ELL). The program served 34.89% of the student population during the 2013-2014 school year (2013-2014 State of the Schools Report). Four full time teachers serve the ELL population at West Lincoln. Special Education students make up 13.5% of the schools population (2013-2014 State of the Schools Report). Five full time teachers serve the Special Education population at West Lincoln. West Lincoln Elementary’s ELL population is one of the largest differences between the two schools. Eastridge Elementary only serves 1% of their students in the ELL program, utilizing a half-day teacher, while West Lincoln is utilizing four full time teachers to meet the needs.

The final piece of data that was used to compare the two schools includes the student population that qualifies for Free and Reduced Lunch. At West Lincoln, 82.11% of students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch, while 31.82% qualify at Eastridge Elementary (2013-2014 State of the Schools Report).

In 2008, West Lincoln was identified as a School in Need of Improvement because of the failure to meet requirements set by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for two consecutive years. After a strong focus on academic achievement, parental involvement, and transitions, West Lincoln met the criteria and was no longer a “Needs Improvement” school in 2010-2011. Over the following two years, however, the school was again identified as a “Needs Improvement” school. The staff at West Lincoln has worked on a comprehensive plan to communicate with parents through the School Improvement Process to meat AYP. West Lincoln has identified and addressed the specific needs of all students and is also working to provide more professional development and training for staff members. The district has been supportive of the process as staff works to meet the expectations for AYP. Because of the failure to meet AYP, parents were given the option the transfer their student(s) out of West Lincoln and enroll them into a different school in LPS (West Lincoln School Profile, 2012-2013).

***How do these schools compare to my past as a student?***

Both of these two schools that have been compared are located in Lincoln, Nebraska, and significantly differ from the world that I come from. I grew up in the small town of Bancroft, Nebraska where the population in 2012 was 489 people (City Data, 2013). In 1982, Bancroft consolidated with the small neighboring community of Rosalie. I was a student at Bancroft-Rosalie Elementary School between the years 1991 and 1999. During the 1999 school year, the elementary school had a total student population of 145 students in Kindergarten through sixth grade. The most recent student demographic data shows that 77% of the student population is white (2013-2014 State of the Schools Report). This data shows a similarity to the population of the students at Eastridge Elementary. The second largest population of students is American Indian/Alaskan Native, which make up 12% of the students. Bancroft-Rosalie is located within miles of the Omaha Nation Reservation in Northeast Nebraska. Many of the students from the reservation travel to the neighboring towns for school, such as Bancroft-Rosalie.

Another similarity that was noted between Bancroft-Rosalie and Eastridge Elementary includes the percentage of students who receive Free and Reduced Lunch. 33.97% of the students at Bancroft-Rosalie qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch while 31.82% qualify at Eastridge Elementary. This shows only a 2.15% difference (2013-2014 State of the Schools Report).

I used this opportunity to reach out to my fifth grade teacher who is currently the Reading Coach for Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools. She shared the school’s mission statement that states, ““Striving For Student Growth and Excellence- All students can learn, Students learn best in a positive, safe environment, Students must be prepared to compete and excel in a digital age, Student’s individual needs must be met, and Students need relevant skills in diverse opportunities.” Through our conversation I was able to see that she was proud of the hard work that her and her colleagues were doing to help students achieve competitive scores on statewide assessments, such as the NeSA. According to combined results of all grades tested, 90% of the students were meeting expectations for reading and math. Based on our conversation, the curriculum and instruction has seen changes since I was a student at Bancroft-Rosalie. Along with educational reforms and higher expectations placed on schools, the staff is teaching with much for rigor and increased expectations have been placed on students. According to their staff handbook, objectives and content are expected for every class, every day. There are to be no “Free days”.

As I drove through the small town of Bancroft, I noticed the same familiar houses and businesses on Main Street that were there when I was a kid. The community is well-kept with mowed lawns and updated signs that line Main Street. The school has seen a recent update that added a significant amount of space and a new gymnasium. This renovation allowed all grades, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, to be in one building. When I was a student children were bussed to Rosalie to attend the elementary school while the high school was located in Bancroft.

***Reflection…***

This experience has given me the opportunity to examine what it is that I bring to my teaching when considering the worlds that my students are personally living in. I feel that understanding the worlds that students come from help us understand their strengths, their areas of struggle, and what they need from us to grow. When comparing the worlds of my students at Eastridge Elementary and the students at West Lincoln Elementary I realize that student strengths, weaknesses, and individual needs may look much different from one another, however, we may also see some similarities. What I see and hear impacts the way I teach by understanding what students need, both academically and emotionally.

Often times, what’s more powerful to understand is what our students see and hear that has the most impact on their learning. In our course reading, Contemporary Issues in Curriculum, we were presented a topic that asks whether or not schools should introduce a values-centered curriculum for all students and included a list of pros and cons. Some would argue that values education is not the responsibility of the school but instead the responsibility of the home (Ornstein, 2011). However, what students may see and hear at home or outside of school could be negatively influencing their growth, motivation, and values needed at school.

These three worlds that I have just described are all centered on their own set of values and beliefs. In the heart of each world are our students and children of the future. Each world is functioning on their own, and in their own isolated way. Often times we do not take the time to view the world of another because we are so wrapped up in our own but when we do take the time we may just realize that we are not that much different. We all want what’s best for our children. We all want to see positive things happening around us. The way we do it just may look different.

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**Visual Representation**

**Eastridge Eagles**

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**Bancroft-Rosalie Panthers**

**West Lincoln Wildcats**

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