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Full Service Schools: My Time at Inskip

As a member of the Baker Center Learning Community, I was required to take Dr. Bob Kronick's Full Service Schools course at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Kronick's class had us visiting inner city schools twice a week for the duration of a semester. It was up to us to collaborate with the schools and decide what we would be doing there.

Maddie Brown and Elizabeth Williams, other students in the Learning Community, and I contacted Inskip Elementary, a small school in north Knoxville. We determined that we would volunteer as tutors in separate classrooms and would also work together on developing an after school program for girls.

I kept a journal of my time at Inskip and have shared it here. In order to minimize confusion, I will save my reflective thoughts for the end. This is the journal in its original form. I have changed the names of the students.

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

First afternoon at Inskip- we had intended to have a group of twelve girls, ideally in a quiet room. In actuality, we were directed to "follow the noise" upon entering the school. Maddie, Elizabeth and I came upon a school cafeteria with 40-50 children eating a snack. They were being cared for by just three women.

The building is an old and dreary structure, but is adorned with bright posters. The children have several toys to play with, but not enough for everyone. The toys are not appropriate for the older kids: fire trucks and blocks may be good for the K-1 graders, but not the 2-5 graders.

We proceeded to sit at a round cafeteria table and were soon joined by Karla, Alyssa, Stephanie, Grace and Sam. We asked each girl to take as many sheets from a roll of toilet paper as they wish.

Observations:

- Alyssa isn't necessarily shy, but has problems speaking up. We had to tell the other children to quiet down so we could hear her. She shared that her cat died while she was in Florida.
- Grace is shy and was upset when another girl pointed out that she and her mother speak Spanish. She denied it.
- Karla is very fixated on *stuff*. Upon hearing my name, she asked if I have "Air Jordans," a kind of tennis shoe that I think is pricey. She only took one square of toilet paper.

- Stephanie originally took 22 squares, but kept telling me she had more and more. She loved the activity because she enjoyed having the opportunity to speak and be heard.

We distributed index cards and told the girls to write their name and draw something that can help us remember them. Alyssa wrote her name and that her cat had died.

At this time, we attracted other children. It was the same each time- the interested child would linger by the table but not come too close. We invited them over to color on index cards.

More observations:

- Jessica, a child with thick-lens glasses, was shocked to learn that I wear glasses too (I was wearing contacts).
- The children were all too eager to rattle off the list of jobs their parents had held. Applebee's was the most common one.
- Jessica made me a card that says "I love you Jordan." She also made a card for her friend who is in the hospital. She said she should be okay but is bruised all over from falling down the stairs. Jessica said this girl lives with her and then named 7-8 other girls' names that also live with her.
- A few of the girls were affectionate and hugging on us when asking us to go to the gym with them.
- A fourth grader was wondering around aimlessly sucking her thumb.
- All of the girls are shocked and thrilled that we will be returning next week.

Tuesday, January 27

Today was my first day as a "tutor" at Inskip. We arrived in the office early, where I was surprised to see an organized binder to keep track of the volunteers through Full Service Schools. There were a bunch of children just hanging around in the office. We signed in and each classroom sent a student to show us to their room. I am assigned to Mrs. Adams's fifth grade class. I introduced myself and she handed me a stack of papers to grade. They were some kind of reading or spelling worksheets. There were no directions at the top and I didn't know what to grade for. I asked the teacher if she had a grading key and I think I must have frustrated her: she said someone had lost the key. She switched out the stack for a stack of math papers: fractions. I had one of those EZ graders. The highest score was a 35% (out of 100%). These children should have been able to simplify fractions a year ago.

I must walk out into the rain to access the fifth grade classroom that is a portable. It is a covered area, though, and being in a portable on a rainy day did not seem to detract from the children's learning.

While I am grading the papers, Mrs. Adams has the six children (the rest are at the TAG gifted program) situated around a table. The TCAP writing assessment is coming up and they are definitely being taught to the test. "You get an extra point for listing items in a sequence,"

the teacher said. She did not really seem to be appealing to the kids' writing skills, but was rather telling them similar things about the test over and over.

Perhaps the thing that struck me most about the class was its disregard for its teacher. She was not acting as an authority figure. When teaching, Mrs. Adams would be prompted by a student to go off on a tangent. She was even sending text messages on her personal phone a few times. I hope to be more involved by working directly with the children in the coming weeks.

Wednesday, January 28

Today we decided to do "highs and lows," when each child would say one good thing and one bad thing about their weeks. One girl said she was sad because she wasn't allowed to see her father anymore. From the way she spoke about it, it sounded like it was a court order.

Then we did an activity where each girl wrote her name at the top of a paper and everyone wrote what they like and admire about each other. The girls insisted on closing their eyes while the three of us wrote on their sheets. The short notes meant a lot to them coming from older girls: I could tell. I wrote "Hey Jordin Sparks (she had been calling herself that), I just know you'll be famous someday!" She pocketed the note and was positively thrilled. All of the kids had a great time and one pleaded her mother to let her stay. Looking forward to next week!

Tuesday, February 3 and Wednesday, February 4: Knox County Schools were out for snow

Tuesday, February 10

Today was a much better experience tutoring with Mrs. Adams's class. I graded a few papers and then proceeded to read with a couple of children. I read a book about a kid running for class president with Shelly and a Boxcar Children book with Carl. The kids read one page and then I would read the next. This is the way they read in class. In my opinion, both books are below grade level: I remember reading Boxcar Children in second grade.

Wednesday, February 11

We went to Inskip this afternoon to make bead bracelets. I brought a kit of beads, mostly letters, so they could spell out their names. The beads were a hit!

We did highs and lows like always. A couple of the girls seemed a bit antsy and kept telling each other to "shut up," but other than that it was okay. Alyssa's birthday is March 9- I should make her a card. Elizabeth brought her camera and the kids enjoyed making "movies." The only thing out of the ordinary was that we had to rush out of the school as there was a tornado coming. Also, Sam mentioned several times that the three of us had such "beautiful clothes."

Tuesday, February 17: Knox County Schools closed for teacher in-service

Wednesday, February 18

The kids were so rowdy today! It was just Elizabeth and I as Maddie is sick. When we walked in, kids ran up and grabbed on to us. I had a child in kindergarten jump from a table and cling to my neck. We weren't mad and I think we handled it well, but the kids were just out of control. The entire hour we spent with them took a lot of energy. I asked a group of girls if they had had a nice long weekend (they had the previous Monday and Tuesday off) and they said no, they had to come into school and sit in the cafeteria all day. I'm guessing this is because their parents work and had to leave them for the day. Maybe this is why they were so out of control.

We brought giant coloring pages and crayons. The pages were from popular Pixar movies: Wall-E, Toy Story, The Incredibles and Monsters Inc. The kids (well, many of them) grabbed at the sheets and were rude which is out of character for them.

We usually start off with a small group of 5-6 older girls and younger ones trickle in, totaling about 12. Today, we had 18 at once. It is impossible to deny a child attention and we don't want to do so, but we started this group with the intention of working with older girls and making it a mentoring program. Today, our normal group of girls was alienated as we had to give the younger ones so much attention. We are going to have to be more structured and forceful next week in order to accommodate the needs of our original group.

We were introduced to a new girl who just started at Inskip. Lindsey is nine years old, yet towers over all the other children and could easily pass as an eighth-grader. Sam, a girl in her fourth grade class, was really sweet to her and introduced her to everyone. I think Sam is the most perceptive girl in our group.

Tuesday, February 24

This morning I went to Inskip to tutor once again in Mrs. Adams's class. The children were adding mixed fractions and a student I was working with was very frustrated because he was not getting the right answer. I reviewed his work and could not find a single error. I realized the teacher was not working the problems correctly. I asked her about it and was very polite but still felt badly about asking in front of the students. Thankfully, she was kind and corrected her mistakes. Nick, the boy who didn't know why he was struggling, was relieved.

Then two other children, Carl and Sarah, came into the room and I worked on the new math concepts separately with them. Sarah was overly embarrassed to ask me for help but responded well to the individualized attention. Carl seems to be struggling with both math and reading. He is such a sweet kid and I think he is really warming up to me. He kept asking how long I could stay this morning and when I was coming back. I ensured him I would go weekly until the end of the year and he made me promise I would be back to see him.

Wednesday, February 25

Today was a fun day. Everyone was better behaved. We brought worksheets for the girls to complete. They were questions we wrote such as "What I want to be when I grow up" and

“My favorite memory.” The girls enjoyed sharing their experiences. One issue we had, however, was that Christina kept talking over everyone. We would give her our attention when she claimed she had something to say, but then she always dragged it out by saying she forgot. I’m not sure if she is just in need of attention or not.

Kendall, a kindergartener, also made our group difficult. She pretends to loudly sob when we tell her to “please be quiet.” As usual, our group swelled to about 30 kids and our small group of girls fell apart due to the distractions. I feel like we are no longer being as effective as we used to be, now that we have so many kids on our hands (and literally hanging on our backs).

I got permission from the adult leader of Kid’s Place to use some of the school’s butcher paper. The kids had a blast tracing their hands and feet as well as drawing all kinds of things! We brought the paper back and hung it up in our hallway in the dorm. Although today was better, we still need to figure out how we can work with everyone.

Overall experience thus far:

I think it’s going well at Inskip! We are relating to the kids well and I think Maddie, Elizabeth and I have the potential to make a difference.

My favorite part of volunteering so far has been when we were able to have long conversations with the older girls at the beginning of our volunteering. I feel like we were really getting through to them. They are all curious about high school and college and love to hear the fun aspects. They do not understand how we live together, away from our parents. Many of the kids still think Maddie and Elizabeth are sisters as they look alike!

My favorite experience so far as a mentor/tutor in Mrs. Adams’s class was yesterday, when I was working with Carl on understanding new math concepts. Carl was very responsive to my help and understood after only a few tries. I have the impression that he is a particularly slow learner and does best when working one-on-one with someone at his own pace. In my own experience, I have found that sometimes it is easier to grasp math concepts when they are explained in a slightly different way in a fresh perspective. I am very glad to have been able to help Carl and look forward to working with him more in the future.

Wednesday, March 4

Today we decided to try to be more relaxed and not bring an activity that would require all the kids to sit down together. We played “Down by the River,” a children’s game in which everyone sit in a circle and sings while a clap goes around. Whoever ends the clap when the song ends is “out.” The kids had not been exposed to this before and had a wonderful time playing! We then played “Duck Duck Goose” and then returned to the first game. At this point, I continued to play the game while Elizabeth played with a group of girls with kitchen toys and plastic food. It may be a good idea for us to plan on splitting up this way in the future; it seemed to work well.

There was a boy, Isaac, with us today that had not been there before. He was struggling to get my attention the whole time. In between one of the games, I talked with him for a few minutes. He told me a “scary story” about a girl just like me that had her face skinned off in the middle of the night. I later heard he told Maddie a similar story about a girl’s head being chopped off. I don’t know how much of this storytelling is common for a boy his age (fourth grade). However, I know I will be keeping a close watch on him next week to see if he is still interested in sharing the same stories.

Kendall, a six year old, has become quite attached to me. She always has to be in my lap or touching me in some way. Today, she grabbed hold of my neck when I was leaning over and crawled up me and fastened her legs around my waist. She wouldn’t get down! I know she was just playing around but I could see her behavior becoming a problem in the future.

One frustration we have encountered is that we are not allowed to take the kids outside. The women who supervise in the cafeteria won’t allow it because it would force them to sit outside with us. Getting the kids out of the cafeteria would allow us to play a bunch of games that wouldn’t be feasible inside. Maybe they’ll change their minds when the weather warms up.

Tuesday, March 10

Today I worked with Mike on cinquains (a form of short poetry) and then with he and Rachel on speed-reading. Rachel met all of the time requirements, but Mike needs to work on reading skills.

Then all the students in the class (six, because the remainder are in the gifted program in another classroom while I am there) sat around a table and worked math problems on whiteboards.

When they had reached the correct answer, they pushed a button that made a noise and lit up to be called on by the teacher. The kids were, of course, far more interested in the buttons than the math and only two students were even trying the problems. The teacher didn’t seem bothered by this in the least bit. It seems to me that she gets very little respect from her students because she doesn’t ask for respect. She doesn’t act like an authority figure at all. If a child says something off-task, she will stop teaching and begin talking about the newly introduced subject. There are always students in and out of the room and she will ask where they are going and they leave without saying anything to her. I think her students would do better if they were in a classroom conducive to learning. Then again, it may just be the time of day I am there when they are thrown off by having fewer students in the classroom.

Wednesday, March 11

Today it was just Maddie and I as Elizabeth is sick. We found that most of the kids were mellow and not bouncing off the walls as usual. We brought Mad Libs I had printed off the internet. Mad Libs is a sort of game where a group will supply random words (adjectives, nouns, etc.) and then read the entire story. It is made funny by words that do not fit in context. When

prompted for different words, the kids didn't know the differences between them. Most of the kids who participated are third, fourth and fifth graders.

The remainder of the day was fun. We played "Down by the River" once again. I got my hair "styled" and played with Legos with Jessica and Adam (sister and brother). A couple of the kids opened up and were talking about their home lives with us. Adam and Jessica told me they are going to the beach for their spring break and are upset because their older sister who doesn't live with them can't go. Emily told us she has six brothers and another sibling on the way. She complained that there is no room in her house.

Tuesday, March 24

In the hour I was in Mrs. Adams's class, not much was accomplished. When I came in, the kids were more or less working on a math worksheet. Then they decided that they would rather read and the teacher obliged. I read a book about baseball "popcorn style" with three students while the others were wandering around the classroom. Mrs. Adams tried to get these students to read, but they chose not to and she let the issue drop. This group went back to the worksheet, but one student ran over to a computer and used an encyclopedia program to research and play whale noises aloud. At this point the entire class, including the students I was reading with, jumped up to go look at the computer. This is how the last fifteen minutes of class was spent. The teacher has very little control over her class; they essentially select their own activities. I believe that Principal Luna has an idea of what is going on. She frequently pops in the classroom and witnesses the students all over the place.

Wednesday, March 25

Our after school group went well today. First, we had the group complete a worksheet I had made- just fun facts about themselves such as their favorite Disney character. We then had a toilet paper dress fashion show! Of course the boys wanted to get involved: they decided to be mummies. It was very cute. The kids paraded up and down the "runway" to Miley Cyrus music. Every age group was into this!

Then Maddie did Mad Libs with some of the older kids while Elizabeth and I played and danced with some of the younger kids. All of the students were in a great mood, there were no fights, and everyone was included. The only trouble Elizabeth and I had was picking up so many of the kids: it's fine for first graders, but fifth graders were a bit heavier! It was a good day at Inskip.

Tuesday, March 31

I had a very good experience at Inskip today. I was asked to work on time-lapse problems with Carl and Rachel. I wrote problems for the two of them to solve. Carl was answering the questions with ease but Rachel was struggling. This was unusual for her as she is always an eager learner and helpful in teaching her classmates. She looked so helpless so I tried to show her the classroom clock as a visual. I asked her what time it was and she said she did not know. I made her guess and she said "9:75." It was 8:35. I spent about 25 minutes with her

and she caught on pretty quickly. The first time she gave me the correct time and I told her she was right, she was so happy she had tears in her eyes. I taught a fifth grader how to tell time.

Wednesday, April 4

Today we came prepared with just crayons and paper. We colored for awhile and then Maddie and I took a group outside (we were finally given permission to do so!) We played hide-and-seek and Sharks and Minnows, which they loved! We had the kids physically hanging all over us more than usual; they were so full of energy. They have really warmed up to us, especially the girls. Tiesha calls me “mommy.” Some of the girls have given the same title to Maddie and Elizabeth.

Today was the first time I thought about termination. It is going to be really hard, especially because it takes us so long to part with them, even though they know we will return the next week.

Tuesday, April 7

Today I had a group of four kids (the advanced students) and we worked a practice set of TCAP problems. The kids were able to understand very little without help, but once I gave them a hint they were able to solve the problems. However, they were not able to grasp multiplying decimals, no matter how I tried to explain it. We were working on paper, but students are now (as of Spring 2008) allowed to use calculators on the TCAP.

I could tell the stress of the upcoming tests was beginning to wear on the students. I wonder if this originates from pressure from the teacher or the school? I was never stressed out during these tests; for me, they meant no homework, a special snack each day and extended recess.

Our group finished way before the rest of the class working with the teacher, so I asked the kids (all on Safety Patrol) about their upcoming trip to D.C. They are going the first week of their summer vacation. Naturally, they are currently only excited about staying in a hotel with their friends. I cannot be certain, but I get the impression that Sarah has yet to leave the greater Knoxville area. Hopefully this trip will be an enriching experience for her.

Sarah told me about her offer to attend Vine Magnet School and how she is rejecting it in favor of going to Gresham Middle. I congratulated her and told her it was great that she had been asked to go, but she seemed to shy away from and resent the fact that she is gifted.

A student whose name I do not know told me that Inskip is the fifth elementary school he has attended. He is worried that he could be moving again soon and may miss the school trip to D.C.

This was my last time to help in Mrs. Adams’s class due to Inskip’s TCAP schedule.

Wednesday, April 4

Our time after school today was very frustrating. Maddie, Elizabeth and I arrived thirty minutes earlier than usual so Maddie could meet with Ms. Luna to help her with her dissertation. We saw the kids in their quiet time before they are released from snack time to play in the cafeteria. They were sitting as a group on the carpet in the cafeteria and were silent and relatively still. When we entered, some of the younger ones started squirming upon seeing us. The Kid's Place employees barked at them and put a few kids' names down on "the list." They then moved over to tables to eat their snacks in silence and another child had her name written down. We always hear kids say they are on "the list" for they day, which usually means they cannot go to the gym if that option is available. Today, it meant that they were not able to participate in their Easter egg hunt.

These poor kids, one of whom was crying, had to sit inside on a beautiful day and watch their peers line up to go outside. There were two groups (Kindergarten through first grade and second through fifth grade) with their own sections to search for eggs. Once the hunt had begun, a kindergartener was walking close to the border (unmarked and had not been explained) for the other group and he was loudly scolded. I was standing far away and could not hear what was said after that, but it appeared that the young student had to sit out for the remainder of the Easter egg hunt. It seems like these kids are being forced to toughen up by their after school care-givers, which is not their place. Granted, I'm sure these women love the children: I even saw one filming the Easter egg hunt. I do think they are being too hard on them.

Wednesday, April 22

When we arrived at Kid's Place today, most of the children were in line to go play outside. A few jumped out of line to come hug us and the women in charge snapped at them. I don't know what they were waiting for, but they made the kids wait in line for almost fifteen minutes. As always, there were some students who could not go outside because they were on "the list." It breaks my heart to see the expression on their faces when their peers get to go play.

Once outside, we had fun with the kids. Maddie, Elizabeth and I each had a child either on our back or in our arms the entire time: the kids are really taken with physical comfort. As we were getting ready to leave, we began talking to the kids about the end of school and summer coming up. I think the older students understood what we meant when we said next week would be our last. However, we lightened the mood by promising to have a party! We got permission from the woman in charge of Kid's Place to bring goodies. This will be a challenge as there are fifty children and we don't want to leave anyone out.

Today, at the civic engagement conference held at the Baker Center, we heard from Dr. McClam, the faculty member that runs the Grief Outreach program at UT. She prepares students to go into the schools to offer counseling advice. I spoke with her afterward and she said it would be fine to take her graduate level course as an undergraduate. As a Political Science/Psychology major, I think this will be a great experience for me and I am really looking forward to it.

Reflection

After school program:

I am grateful to have been a volunteer at Inskip. I truly enjoyed working with the students and miss seeing them. I often wonder where they are now, three years later.

Our after school group was intended to serve as a resource for fourth and fifth grade girls. Maddie, Elizabeth and I thought we would have ten to twelve students each week and use our time as a type of peer mentoring experience. We had expected to lead our group in a classroom, but were not able to do so due to supervision requirements. However, as shown in the journal, each kid in the program was hungry for attention and wanted to spend time with us.

Working with the Kid's Place staff presented some challenges for us. There were only two to four staff members taking care of a cafeteria full of kids. There was no organized activity other than the snack provided right after the school day ended. I was sad to see there was no stimulating exercise for the students. The kids had to beg the Kid's Place employees to go outside or to go play in the gym. As far as I can tell, the employees did not want to take them out as this would mean they would have to split up and end their conversations. They did not care for us coming in and changing the status quo. While they knew each child, they did not want to be bothered by them.

I feel I should explain some of our activities. Being college freshmen on a budget, we had very little to spend on materials. We purchased some giant coloring books, which went a long way. My personal favorite was when we did a fashion show and made mummies out of toilet paper. We hoarded extra toilet paper provided by our dorm for weeks.

Tutoring:

Tutoring did not go as smoothly as I had pictured. Mrs. Adams's classroom environment seemed like a disorganized mess each time I was there. However, I believe I was there at an awkward time in the school day. Not only was it early in the morning, but the class size was also cut in half as several students were attending the TAG gifted program during that time. It was also just before specials (gym, music and art class) and the students were often worked up in anticipation.

Working in Mrs. Adams's class allowed me to experience the true meaning of "teaching to the test." There were constant remarks made about the upcoming state test, TCAP, by both the students and their teacher. The level of stress was evident. I agree that the students should be prepared for the tests, but some of the comments made saddened me. I heard Mrs. Adams say a few times "You don't need to know that. That will not be on the test."

Grief Outreach Program

In fall 2009, I took a graduate level course with Dr. Tricia McClam and Mr. Michael Catalana. Myself and six other students served as layperson counselors in Knoxville schools. We even had to obtain malpractice insurance.

I met with four students, once again at Inskip Elementary. They had each been referred to guidance by either a teacher or their parents. I met with each student individually for thirty minutes each week. We met in the semi-empty school cafeteria in the mornings. Obviously I am not a trained counselor, but I believe each kid benefited from the individualized attention.

Here is the journal I kept while visiting Inskip as a part of UT's Grief Outreach Program. I have changed the names of the students.

Ted is a fourth grade boy at Inskip. He was referred to me by his teacher, Mr. Foster, who said he has been acting out in class and struggles to control his anger.

Monday, August 31

I met with Ted for the first time. He is quiet, but is able to communicate well when he has something to say. He has a fourteen-year-old brother, Ivan, and it seems like they fight a lot. Ted was quick to say that he is not athletic and sounded sad about it. He seemed to expect me to be disappointed in him. When asked, his favorite thing to do is wrestle. Ted is very perceptive. His father is in jail but I do not know anything else about the situation. I do know that he lives in an apartment with his mother, brother and his mother's boyfriend. Ted spoke fondly of this man. However, it sounds like he misses his father a lot.

We didn't talk a lot about bullying at school (why he was referred), but we did talk about how his brother picks on him at home. Ted almost always hits his brother and runs to his room and sits on his bed to wait for his mom to come talk to him. This happens one or two times each week. We talked about other strategies, such as stepping outside to scream or to punch a pillow. His homework is to try one of these.

Ted said he didn't know why he was meeting me when I asked him. I told him that Mr. Foster thought it would be a good idea because he noticed some anger issues and his aggression toward other children. Ted agreed that it is a problem.

He really liked the M&M activity: the only time I saw him smile. There was some kind of drill during our session and we had to go sit against the wall in the hallway. Ted goes to the Boys and Girls Club (which he refers to as daycare) in the afternoons after school.

September 21

Ted was quiet at the beginning of this session but opened up more toward the end. He told me he collects cars and I gave him the orange one I had in my bag. We colored pictures of

our houses. Ted told me he moved to a new house this weekend and he likes it. Ted told me he thinks I am meeting with him because his grandmother died and he has been very angry since then. He said she passed away a couple of weeks ago. He was able to smile while telling me some of the funny memories he had with her.

Ted then showed me a mark on his palm where his brother Ivan hurt him. Ted said he “doesn’t like sisters.” He has a stepsister who is also nine and lives with him but attends another school.

Ted and I talked about gardening. It’s something Ted is interested in learning. He wanted to be in Inskip’s gardening club but only two students in each class could participate. Ted’s favorite subject is science and he loves Oreos. We talked about how he moved over the weekend.

September 28

Today Ted and I talked about favorites. He had a hard time coming up with them. He likes the Terminator and Transformer movies but would not tell me his favorite. He doesn’t like to watch the same movies over and over. He no longer has cable in his new house and misses it a lot. I asked him about Arthur, a show on PBS, but he doesn’t like that show either. He might have a favorite food- bologna. Ted’s homework for the week is to come up with his favorites.

Ted is upset because he still does not have a new mattress. He is currently sleeping on one that used to be used for a bunk bed. It sounds to me like Ted is struggling with this because it was promised to him and he has been disappointed so far.

There were a couple of breaks in the conversation when Ted said he was trying to think about what he would like to talk about with me. I think rapport has been sufficiently established to move on to working with him.

We also talked about scary movies. Ted’s mom made he and his brother stop fighting. The only time he remembers getting mad this week was because he is still missing his mattress.

Here are Ted’s favorites:

Dream job: FBI

Superpower: Ability to move things so others would think they were moved by ghosts.

Ted asked me if I had ever seen a car wreck. I told him I had not, but he said he had. He saw something go through the windshield of a car and it missed hitting the two passengers who were okay. I have the impression that this was awhile ago but it is still on his mind.

October 5

Ted’s homework from the previous week was to identify his favorite items:

Favorite snack: cosmic brownies, strawberry shortcake and blue Doritos

Ted still hasn't gotten his mattress.

We talked a lot about daycare. People were ganging up on him for a fight. He handled it by getting his older brother. I am not sure if it is a problem anymore. Ted says he feels safe because there are some new teachers who are stricter. We talked about the difference between a tattletale and a lie. He seems to be mature in knowing when it is appropriate to talk to an authority figure. I asked Ted what makes him angry; he said liars and his teacher.

October 12: Ted is absent

October 19

Ted and I played with Play-Doh. We didn't talk much. Ted did tell me that his dad got out of jail last week. He has seen his dad but his other siblings haven't yet. His dad lives in Knoxville.

Ted isn't allowed to go trick-or-treating but it sounds like his family celebrates Halloween. He is hoping to get candy at church.

When playing with Play-Doh, he made a doughnut-shape and said he hasn't had a doughnut in awhile. His favorite kind is raspberry filling with orange and red icing. Ted doesn't like Mr. Foster and wants Ms. Lefler instead.

October 26

Today I introduced the emotion ball. I think it really helped Ted to open up. He likes to talk when he has something to talk about. We played with the emotion ball the entire session without him tiring of it.

Ted's answers and articulation are beyond the skill level of a fourth grader. He speaks confidently. Also, he finally got his mattress!

He told me about how he earned the scar on his leg when he was being chased by a Chihuahua. He kept cracking up because the dog was so little. His cousin was also chased by a Chihuahua and he thought this was funny.

Ted smiled much more today than usual.

November 2

Ted had a full session today. We did Mad Libs and played with Play-Doh. We talked about how his daycare is going. He said he is doing better in handling his stress. Ted is having a birthday party at Chuck-E-Cheese.

Ted kept talking about how he was frustrated that he didn't do anything over the weekend. He did not dress up for Halloween, was not allowed to watch television and did not

play outside. I pressed him for things he may have done but he insisted that he did absolutely nothing. This concerns me. He asked me “Are you the same age as Barack Obama?”

November 9

Ted and I talked about his tenth birthday, which was yesterday. He had a party at Chuck-E-Cheese. It’s funny; Ted acts far older than his age so I do not expect him to enjoy a place like Chuck-E-Cheese. He told me about his presents: he received a jacket, a board game, \$100 cash and was allowed to have two friends spend the night. I am so glad he had something positive to say about his weekend!

Ted’s face lit up when he saw I had brought him a cupcake. I could tell it meant a lot that I had remembered his birthday.

He asked if I like UT: this surprised me, as he doesn’t usually ask me questions.

We played with Play-Doh and the conversation kept going which is good. He doesn’t know what he wants to do next week.

Ted says he really likes meeting with me so he can miss art class where they do “girly stuff.”

November 16

Unfortunately, today was our last day. Ted continually thanked me for his treats. He was genuinely glad that I remembered what he had suggested. Conversation was slightly awkward today. He had a hard time thinking of things to say, even when prompted by my questions. We talked quite a bit about movies.

I asked Ted about his anger and he said it had improved a lot. I followed up with that and he said it’s because of meeting with me. I told him he didn’t have to say that but he said it’s true.

Ted asked if I meet with students at Norwood Elementary where his stepsister attends. She is also in fourth grade and lives with Ted but travels a lot. When asked, Ted said the question ball was his favorite activity.

I tried to give him two racecars but he insisted that I keep one.

Alex is a fourth grader who was referred to me by his mother and Principal Luna. They believe Alex is bothered by the recent death of his grandmother over the summer.

I first met with Alex on Monday, August 31st at 8:35 AM and he left at 9:25 AM. Alex just wanted to talk and talk. He kept discussing material possessions. Alex plays on a football team (Central Cougars) and wants new equipment. He kept rattling off a list of what he needs even when we were on another topic. Alex expressed his hope that his father would buy him

football gear when he comes to visit. He told me his dad is in jail for getting into a fight at Myrtle Beach and is now in Nashville.

Alex was very interested when I introduced myself and said I am a student at the University of Tennessee. He asked me questions about not living with my parents anymore. He says he does very well in school and wants to go to college someday.

Alex has problems getting to sleep at night and would like help with that. He said if he's cold he will push his bed next to his mother's as they don't always have the heat on in the winter.

Alex very casually mentioned that he has been to four different elementary schools and that this is his first year at Inskip. He did not seem to think was odd or a big deal, although he mentioned a friend he misses at his old school. I think Alex is stressed by instability. He kept mentioning that he is a car rider (home from school) next week when it did not fit into the conversation. Talking about material things and his concern about money would fit with him not doing well with instability.

Alex has a younger sibling, Allen who is in second grade and lives with him and attends Inskip. He has an eleven-year-old brother that divides his time between Alex's house and his father's house. Alex also has two or three sisters (he couldn't remember) who don't live with him.

Alex thinks we need to work on his anger "explosions." I tried the M&M activity with him but he didn't calm down at all. He was very appreciative of the M&Ms and asked me twice where I got them.

I spoke with Amy Brace, Inskip's vice principal, after I met with Alex. She said Alex's mother is very happy Alex is meeting with me. Alex was overly concerned and weary of giving me his mother's name and phone number for the required 'contact sheet' I have to turn in for my class.

September 21

Alex was talkative as usual and happy to see me. We talked about his game today and a lot about football in general. We colored and he drew Tom Brady. I saw Sam, a student I had previously worked with in the after school program.

Alex's favorite school subject is math. We talked about trampolines for almost ten minutes. Alex also kept making references to the medication he is on. He said it makes him unable to eat and sleep so he has been trying different medications recently.

I met Alex's mom in the hallway and she said she is very concerned about Alex as "he was the one who saw it." I believe she was referring to the death of his grandmother.

September 28

Alex was quieter than usual today as he had a sinus headache, which he blamed on his “football allergies.” He asked me about UT football and we talked about all of the college games that were on television Saturday.

October 5

Today we did the anger-volcano activity where he drew what makes him angry coming out of a volcano. We also talked about football again. Alex is a big Georgia fan. It seems like his order of favorite teams is Georgia, Florida and Tennessee. He is always interested in my reaction to the Tennessee games.

October 12

Today Alex and I played the card game War. He had fun and was glad I had brought cards. Alex had a good weekend: he watched the Georgia/Tennessee game and went to church and saw his “Big Brother” who took him to exercise. Alex’s favorite chocolate bar is Crunch. Nothing really came up in conversation that was controversial or odd. I asked about his adjustment at school and asked if he has lots of friends (yes) and if he has one best friend (no).

October 19

Alex was like a different child today. I think he was just wiped out. We talked college football for a few minutes and we were coloring. He tried to draw Tim Tebow and the Florida stadium but got frustrated and kept scribbling over it. He put his head down and kept marking over his drawing with a pencil. He stopped responding to my questions.

Principal Luna came in the cafeteria and Alex would not respond to her, even when she took his paper away from him. He didn’t even look up. When it was time to go, he would not respond even when I gave him a ten second warning. I went to the office and got Mrs. Brace to come down and help me with him. She had to literally drag Alex by the arm down the hallway to her office. She did not get any information out of him during this process. She asked him if he was tired and he shook his head no.

I think he was just tired. He had attended a church trip to West Virginia over the weekend. It is also possible that he was affected by a change in medication.

October 26

Alex and I talked about football today. Of course! He was happy that Tennessee almost beat Alabama. Alex went to the circus this weekend at Thompson-Boling and was sad he didn’t see me there. I had told him I live and go to school at UT.

I asked Alex what had happened last week. He shrugged and continually said he didn’t know. After a couple of more questions, he admitted that he had been exhausted from his trip and that he hates Mondays. After leaving with Mrs. Brace, he had to go to the “pack room.” He

told me this is a place where he goes to work on stuff. That's all I could get out of him on the topic.

I introduced the emotion ball with Alex and he liked it. I think his favorite part of the activity was the ball itself, but that's fine. He did get a bit bored toward the end of our session today, but this is typical for Alex.

November 2

We did Mad Libs today. This was difficult for Alex as he struggles with grammar. We also played with Play-Doh. He was in an excellent mood today.

November 9

Alex said he was very happy, but tired. We talked about the Tennessee game and he was very appreciative of the snack I brought. Alex had some good ideas for next week's plans: writing poems and stories about Thanksgiving. He would like to make a card for his mom. I can tell Alex likes to surprise her.

I made sure that Alex remembered next week would be my last time meeting with him.

November 16

Today was our last meeting together. Alex was glad for the snacks. We discussed the football games, as usual. We sat at a different table than usual and Alex was distracted by the new location and the posters on the wall he hadn't seen before. I asked Alex what he got out of meeting with me and he said he didn't know.

While walking him back to class, Alex asked me questions regarding termination. Was I going to another school? I explained to him that my class was ending and he seemed to understand that. Alex was quiet the rest of the way to the classroom. I let him keep the blue Play-Doh.

Allen is a boy in second grade. He is Alex's younger brother.

The first time I met with Allen, I quickly noticed he is talkative and unfocused like his brother. He had just been on a church retreat over the weekend and kept talking about how he was frustrated he couldn't go swimming. It was challenging to get Allen to respond to my questions. I got frustrated but hopefully did not show it.

September 28

It was easier for Allen to focus this week, probably because it wasn't our first time meeting. We did more introductory exercises, continuing to establish rapport.

October 5

We talked about Alex's father in jail for what happened at Myrtle Beach: he tried to drown someone. Alex and Allen have different fathers. Allen told me he went to his cousin's birthday party this weekend. He complained that "a bunch of Mexicans" were throwing rocks at the bounce house inflatable he was playing in.

Allen's favorite candies are Snickers, Hot Tamales and Gushers. We played with and categorized dinosaurs and other animals I had brought. Allen shared that he is very proud of himself for making a 95% on his report card.

October 12

We played with animals and Play-Doh. Allen told me he had been switched into Mrs. Ott's class because of his mom, but wants to go back to Mrs. Carnes's class. Allen's mom seems to be very involved at her sons' school.

October 19

Allen and I played War, which he loved. He asked me a lot of questions about college and told me he wants to "go there." I think he believes college is a single place in one location. He had a play date with Steven (the fourth student I meet with) this weekend- I did not know they are friends. Allen asks a lot of questions about my meetings with Alex.

He is going to be Batman for Halloween. Allen still wants to switch back to his original class.

October 26

Allen was in a cheerful mood as he usually is. We played with the emotion ball for about 25 minutes: he loved it! I hadn't expected him to be entertained for more than 10 minutes.

Allen is still amazed that I live with my friends even though my family is in Nashville. I try to continue to stress that it's because I am in college. Allen says he wants to go to college. I think he has a better grasp on what college is.

I feel like today's session was the first of our working stage. Allen talked about missing his Maw Maw who passed away a couple of months ago. His grandfather is also deceased. We talked about positive memories with his grandmother. Allen is also close with his uncle, who he seems to look up to.

November 2

Allen and I played with Play-Doh and did Mad Libs. The Mad Libs were very difficult for Allen. Although he is only in second grade, I think he should know adjectives and nouns. Allen's favorite candies are Reece's cups and Snickers bars. We talked more about college and how he must continue to do well in school in order to get there.

November 9

Allen was beyond thrilled by the treat and scarfed down his cupcake. We played with the animals and Play-Doh while we talked. Allen kept asking about my meetings with his brother and with other children. He also asked me about college again. We counted out the number of years for him until he goes to college.

November 16

Allen was extra happy to see me. Someone from the school's office had called down to his classroom to say someone wouldn't be in school that day and he thought they were talking about me. Allen was very excited about the snack but upset that it was my last day with him.

I asked him about our time together and if it had helped him. I asked about how he is dealing with his grandmother's death. He said he was fine, but Alex is upset by her death as he saw it happen. Allen described her death and it sounded like he was describing a heart attack. Now I realize what his mother meant when I met her.

I let Allen keep the red Play-Doh and a racecar.

Steven is a second grader who lost his dad in a car accident two weeks before I started meeting with him.

September 21

Today was my first time meeting with Steven. He said he was having a good day and he seems like a generally happy child from what I can tell so far. He was telling me about his siblings. Steven has a three-year-old sister and a brother in sixth grade. Steven was in the middle of talking about his siblings when he abruptly hung his head and mentioned that his dad had just died. We talked about feelings related to losing his dad. Steven told me his neighbor gave him a bear he can hug and it will be like he's hugging his dad.

Steven lives with his mom, two siblings, and his grandparents on his mom's side. They live in his grandparent's house. I am not certain, but I have the impression this was the same living situation before his dad died.

Steven asked if we could sit in the courtyard- maybe next time; it was a bit cold today.

September 28

We talked about basic things, such as Steven's schoolwork and what he likes to do for fun. He really likes learning about animals. Steven loves heavy metal music because that is what his dad liked.

October 5

Steven was very appreciative of the plastic toy animals I brought. I think he felt special that I remembered we talked about how he likes animals. We talked a little bit about some of his favorite things. Gushers are his favorite snack.

October 12

Steven and I played War and then colored. He drew night and day with an elephant in the middle and explained his drawing showing happy and sad emotions. Steven is an extremely advanced communicator for his age.

October 19

Steven and I played with Play-Doh. He told me about his play date over the weekend. I happened to know from Allen that Steven had come over to his house. Of course, I didn't mention this to Steven. Steven is such a positive kid.

October 26

Steven was not having as good of a day as usual, but I don't know why. We did the emotion ball for about half of our time. One feeling he landed on led him to talking about his dad. He laid his head down on the table for just a second and then popped back up as he always does. He then promptly asked if we could do another activity. We did Mad Libs and he loved it. He returned to class in a better mood than when I first saw him.

November 2

Steven was disappointed that he couldn't dress up or go trick-or-treating because it was raining on Halloween. We did Mad Libs for a second time and then played with the animals.

November 9

Steven was so excited when I came to pick him up from his class. My time with Allen ran over. Steven saw me walking down the hallway with Allen and was excited to tell me that Allen is his friend.

Steven immediately asked if we could play with the animals again. I am glad to see him so happy despite all that he is going through. We played with the animals and then with the cars.

Steven was very appreciative of the treat I brought and is excited for his birthday. He is sad about my leaving and asked why. He seemed disappointed but understanding of why I will no longer be seeing him each week.

November 16

Today was our last day! Steven remembered this and was excited for the celebration. He kept saying he wished it wasn't our last time together. He was thrilled that I remembered his snack preferences. He ran to the restroom and when he came back I had set up the snack and the animals. Steven's face lit up like Christmas. He is such a genuinely happy kid and it makes me so happy to see him that way.

We played with the animals and he named them (Ellie, Rexy, Melvin, Marty and Sophie). There is a lot of truth to children acting out issues through play therapy. Rexy had to go to the dentist just as Steven has to go to the dentist next week. I gave Rexy to Steven to keep.

Steven said he would like to meet with someone else next semester when I asked him about it. I hope someone is able to make it to Inskip to meet with him on a regular basis. I think the individualized attention has been good for him.

Reflection

Meeting with these students was a wonderful experience. I focused on giving them the best individual attention I possibly could. This is why I emphasized talking about their "favorites" and celebrating their birthdays. I learned about the termination process in my Grief Counseling class and had to phase out our meetings at the end of my time at Inskip.

I often wonder where these students are now and how school is going for them. In February 2010, a teacher shot both Principal Luna and Mrs. Brace. It was Ted's teacher. Unfortunately, I was not able to contact Ted per the termination rules. I hope he is doing well. Principal Luna and Mrs. Brace are both very powerful, strong women and have returned to work at Inskip Elementary.