Contextual Factors

Community, school, and classroom factors:

Pecan Park Elementary, once known as Henry L. Whitfield, is located in the West Jackson area in Jackson, Mississippi. Pecan Park Elementary is considered a low performing school and is 1 of 38 elementary schools in the Jackson Public School District. Jackson Public school district has approximately 30,609 students in K-12. The students enrolled in Jackson Public School district range from 97.58% African Americans, 1.60% in Caucasians, Hispanics with .67%, Asian at 14%, and the Native Americans with .01%. Pecan Park Elementary currently has 525 students in grades pre-k through five and 29 teachers on staff. Pecan Park Elementary School is above both the state and district averages in terms of the percentage of its students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. On average, 64% of students in Mississippi are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, whereas 94% of Pecan Park Elementary School students are eligible. At the district level, 86% of students are eligible. Pecan Park Elementary School’s enrollment rate for gifted and talented is 12%.

The Students (learning approaches, skills, and prior knowledge):

Currently, there are 27 students in the class I’m teaching. All 27 students are African American. There are 13 girls and 14 boys. Each student is either 8 or 9 years old. Based on observations and other factors, it can be determined that most of the students in the class come from low-income families. There are not any cultural differences among the class. This class does not have any exceptional education students. However, there are 3 students who have been retained. Most students are performing well academically and have little trouble working independently. Occasionally, there are times when the instructions have to be read and/or explained in detail to provide additional assistance or clarification on assignments. Although, most of them gain a full understanding through the visual demonstrations, kinesthetic seems to
have the best outcome. The students always seem to enjoy hands on activities and it keeps them engaged. The students will be working on a chapter in Social Studies that focuses on how “Citizens Make a Difference.” In this chapter, students will focus on vocabulary and reading strategies as we discuss how “Citizens Make a Difference.” Students will identify responsibilities at home, school, and community. Students will also explain how citizens can help improve their community and ways to promote the common good in a community. In the following week, students will understand the concept of money earned (income), savings, and spending. Students will gain knowledge of using money/bartering to obtain goods and services.

**Instructional Implications:**

There are several students who lack parental involvement. As a result, academic performance is affected. I will continue to assist students with reading the assignments and allow time for them to read the material silently. I will allow time for any questions and provide additional assignments for students to work on independently outside of the classroom. I will take full advantage of cooperative learning groups when appropriate.
Learning Goals

**Learning Goal 1:** The students will understand the interdependence of people, places, and environment that make up the local community. The students will use social studies tools to describe the connections among the people, places, and environment of the community. The students will use maps and globes to find relative and absolute locations in regard to different communities.

**Learning Goal 2:** The students will understand the historical circumstances and conditions of civil human rights struggles in local communities. The students will identify important beliefs commonly held by Americans about themselves and their government. Students will explain why certain civic responsibilities are important to individuals and to the community. The students will describe different ways people in a community can influence their local government.

**Learning Goal 3:** The students will understand basic economic concepts and their effects on our community. The students will identify the ways in which a community depends upon other communities to provide for its wants and needs and goods and services. Define what a “tax” is and the purpose of paying taxes. The students will identify resources and scarcity of resources within the community. The students will describe opportunity costs of choices made in the community. The students will describe the division of labor within the community.

**Learning Goal 4:** The students will understand how the diversity of people and customs affects the local community. The students will explain how cultural artifacts represent cultures in local communities. The students will compare and contrast celebrations of various groups within the local community. The students will research and identify historical figures of various cultures.

*The learning goals are aligned with the Mississippi Framework and the Jackson Public School pacing guide.*
Assessment Plan

Before beginning my unit, I will assess students by activating their prior knowledge on the topic we will be discussing. This will be used to see how much they know about the content before I begin to teach. This technique will allow me to see how much time I need to spend on a certain topic if at all. Both the post and pre-assessment will be worth 100 points. They will not receive credit for questions answered incorrectly or left unanswered. The format of the pre-assessment will consist of a KWL chart and a Venn diagram. The post assessment will consist of 10 multiple choice questions. The questions on both assessments align with the learning goals that have been prepared for this unit. The questions will cover skills that focus on basic economic concepts.

With Learning Goal 1, the students will be asked to explain the significance people, places, and the environment has on a community. Students will use time lines, maps, and graphs to describe the connections among the three.

During Learning Goal 2, the students will be asked to recall and write about a time where they practiced good citizenship by either being brave, responsible, or respectful. Students will make list of differences between rights and responsibilities and give examples. Students are responsible for learning vocabulary words in chapters and will be tested accordingly.

In relation to Learning Goal 3, students will work in groups to create a list of citizens in the community and discuss way to become and remain active citizens in their communities. Students will put ideas together, construct sentences, and share information with the class.

In Learning Goal 4, students will be assessed on how well their material relates to the content of the topics. Students will also be assessed on punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure.
I will use multiple assessments to check students’ progress. One of the assessments is enforced and encouraged within the school district. The district puts emphasis on vocabulary within the content area. With reading content, teachers are encouraged to review list of vocabulary words given in each chapter. The students are taught to use context clues to help determine what each word means.

I will use KWL charts and Venn diagrams to have students tell what they know about citizenship, rights, and responsibilities. This will open a class discussion on what we are discussing within the text. This will give students an opportunity to express what they know and have a desire to know.

Students will be given homework each night to reinforce what they have learned. The class will go over homework each day to reassure accuracy and that everyone understands. This is a great way to see what I may need to spend more time on and areas we may need to revisit before the test.

Students will be made fully aware of the material that will be covered on the test beforehand. Students will be asked to take notes. Students will also be given handouts for additional help. Students will be given a review before taking the test.
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**Design for Instruction**

In this unit, I will use a variety of strategies. The students will be involved in multiple activities. I will have the students participate in cooperative learning activities. I will use graphic organizers to activate students’ knowledge at the beginning of lessons.

I will start the lesson by using a Venn diagram and ask students to discuss how rights are different from responsibilities. The students will give information on what they know about rights and responsibilities and how they differ. I will use students’ responses in diagram and record on board so they will be visible. Students will be lead into discussion with questions such as: What are ways they can be good citizens? How can they participate in the community and/or improve the lives around them? I will have students review vocabulary in chapter.

The students will list ideas of why they think it’s important to have a government in a community. Students will be given a prompt and asked to write detailed paragraphs about an experience where they were either brave, responsible, or respectful. Students must write complete sentences using correct grammar and punctuation. Students will be required to read and share responses with the class.

**Technology**

I will use technology in planning my instruction by using a computer to construct my lesson plans. I will be using the overhead projector to display the KWL charts and Venn diagrams. I will use video to record lessons as well. Unfortunately, this classroom does not have a promethean board. There will be times when I simply use the dry erase board. As usual, I won’t completely rely on technology because it can fail at any given moment.
Instructional Decision-Making

There were very little changes made to the original lesson plan based on student learning. I did change or modify one of the activity sheets I originally planned to use. I noticed that the students had mastered the majority of the material on the activity; therefore, we were able to move on. I was able to replace it with material from the next section of the chapter. This method saved a great deal of time being that I recognized early on that the previous activity was not needed. Fortunately, I already had copies made of the second activity I used as a replacement.

Another modification was made while students were in whole groups on problem solving. There were a few students who didn’t quite understand the problem solving that was a part of the budgeting plan. However, the majority of the class mastered the skill. I decided to let those students work in small groups to gain a better understanding through direct instruction. The students were to create a budget plan showing the amount of money they have to spend and save. Students were asked to show in detail what they chose to spend money on and how much. Students were also giving a word problem where they were to calculate money based on the information given. Students were to decide if they would have enough money to buy a certain item given the cost based on how much money they started with and were later given. Also, students were required to show work and explain answer. I walked around the room to assess those students who were struggling. I realized those students who were having trouble were also struggling in math. I was able to re-score those students and they all earned passing grades. Those that were able to complete the assignments, were able to move on to the next skill.
Analysis of Student Learning

I have noticed with both first graders as well as third, there is a problem with writing and social skills. However, students somehow tend to speak more fluently than they write. Many students are struggling with forming thoughts and putting them on paper. There are several students who are not using correct punctuation or spelling as needed. Some students are still requiring a lot practice that they are not taking advantage of outside the classroom. Students are able to comprehend and give answers verbally during whole group reading. However, there are students who give very little effort toward completing assignments.

Previously, on the pre-assessment 20 % of the students failed while at least 80 % made passing scores. Modifying my lesson plan and quickly recognizing what areas needed to be revisited, not visited, or very briefly helped out a great deal. Also, using the Venn diagrams and KWL really allowed students to get a visual on the topics discussed. Visuals really worked well with this class. They were able to reactivate their prior knowledge and build on current topics. The diagrams gave students practice with comparing and contrast which provided students with a better understanding overall. However, after modifying the lesson and incorporating Venn diagrams students’ grades improved. 85 % of students made passing grades. Students really enjoy working in groups and are able to help one another which is fun. I also found that the students showed a real interest in reading aloud. Students love to participate in discussions but it’s very hard sometimes to keep them engaged. I begin incorporating things that they can relate to in the discussion to spark an interest. Students gain a much better understanding when they find the topic interesting. I gained such a positive from students when I engage them in discussions and include them. Students are far less interested when the teacher does nothing but
lecture. Students are sometimes very easily distracted and finding things that interest them is important. Again, I’m learning to always try to incorporate things they find interesting in the lesson.
Reflection and Self-Evaluation

This second placement is very different from the first. There are more students and they are of course older. The classroom is a lot smaller and crowded. The room is also always hot because the teacher keeps the heat up extremely high. This is sometimes very uncomfortable. The students in this placement do not need as much assistance as I had gotten used to the students needing in the first. This classroom is set up differently from most classrooms. There are no desks in this room. Instead, there are several tables which take up ample space. The class is set up like a lab. This room does not have very much technology. There is an overhead projector and a television present in the class. I will be teaching Social Studies so I’ll have to be extra creative to make the lessons interesting. I have learned in this second placement that I had become really attachment to the first graders in the first placement. I find it refreshing when I see those students in the hallways. I really became accustomed to the first placements class routine and schedule. I am very much still adjusting.

I find myself having a much harder times remember the names of the students in this placement. However, I was able to remember all the students’ names in the first placement within a week and a half. This class also spends a lot of time on Science experiments. Most of the activities are hands on. This allows students to move and use their hands. Students seem to really perk up during days we conduct experiments. Shortly after I arrived students begin working on edible plant cells and use different candy to create the model. Students were given a model of Jell-O as the base and also used grapes, twizzlers, gummy rings, and etc. I found this experiment really neat and interesting. I am considering using this one day as an activity in my class. I love how engaged and excited students were during this experiment. This allowed them a chance to gain knowledge, have fun, and eat all at once.
During my first lesson, I really lost track of time. I was so focused on the lesson and covering it thoroughly that time completely escaped me. We actually ran over the class period and were forced to stop without a clear ending. Since then I have really learned to manage my time wisely. I still over plan to avoid downtime but I’m very mindful of the time now. I am learning something new each day. I have learned so much of what not to do. I am also working on staying organized. I am also quickly learning which students have behavioral problems. My cooperating teacher has no problem calling parents when students are misbehaving. This method works for some students and for others it does not. The teacher sometimes makes students stand the entire class period if they are causing disruptions. Most of the students have no problem showing me respect but there are at least 3 who simply have no control at times. This class also participates in a growing a garden outside near the playground. There’s a representative from Food Corps that comes a few days out the week to work with the children in the garden. Inside the garden there are tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, peppers, and etc. The children really seem to enjoy days that they are allowed to spend time in the garden. The children are allowed to do taste samples of different vegetables growing in the garden. Recently, they had salad fresh out the garden. Students taste and sample food and record their opinions on a sheet.

Today, I spent time creating teacher made test and posting the student’s work outside the classroom. This is something that I didn’t get to do in the first placement. I am really enjoying my experience. There are still the many challenges of dealing with behavioral issues from certain students. I have been rewarded students for bringing their homework back completed and signed. This method seems to have really motivated students and brought about a positive response. This has also given me ideas for my own classroom in the future. I plan to use a treasure chest to reward students for positive behavior and academic performance. I’ve learned that sometimes all
students need is motivation and some type of incentive in place. This week students are working on the skeleton system. They’ve watch videos from Schoolhouse Rock on the skeleton system. Students also cut out and labeled skeletons which we hung outside the classroom. Next, students will focus on the digestive system and the order in which it works. Students created their own drawings as models of the digestive system. These were also hung outside the classroom for display.

As time grows near, I’m becoming more and more confident during my lessons. I’m focus more on critical thinking skills. I’m really trying to find different ways to get students to think. It’s important to challenge students and stimulate their minds. I am also making sure not to lecture the entire time. I am still letting students take part in discussions and voice their opinions. In addition, I always find a way to incorporate small group activities. The students really enjoy working together and tend to learn from each other. This week, students are working on creating a model of the lungs using half of a water bottle, balloon, putty, and straws. As usual, most of all the experiments are placed outside for display. The teacher used small shoe boxes to place each model in. I am learning a lot of creative methods for different experiments to use in the future.