Observation of Teaching, Dr. Orvil White, Assistant Professor

By: Lin Lin, Childhood/Early Childhood Education

Date: October 22, 2007

Class: Teaching Elementary School Science (11:20-12:10) with Section 600 linked block

Class Setting, VH 225: Students sat in groups. Major steps of inquiry were put on the blackboard in different colors.

I missed the beginning of the class, but Dr. Benton, who was there earlier, told me that Dr. White started his class with one student volunteer reading a children's book about science.

Dr. White explained to the class that today's project is to conduct an inquiry into force and motion using Newton's three laws of motion. He asked students to review the three laws, one at a time. Students shared their definitions of the three laws. For each of the laws, Dr. White paraphrased the students' definitions, and then provided a simple example for each of the laws.

Then he asked them to work in groups. Each group got instructions and materials they needed to create a roller coaster for an amusement park. The instructions had detailed requirements of this roller coaster. Materials students could be using were prepared by Dr. White. Marbles (as roller coaster cars), plastic sealing materials (as roller coaster rails), tapes, and other materials students might need to create their projects.

Students in groups started their projects. Dr. White answered students' questions to clarify their understanding of the project. His affect was pleasant as he circulated in the classroom and checked with each group to make sure their projects were on the right track. Most students were engaged. It took one or two students longer to get interested engaged in their group projects. My suggestion for this is that Dr. White could have assigned each of the students a specific role in the group and each of the group members took turns playing the roles.

I observed the groups that were closer to me in the classroom. One group created special designs to slow down their roller coaster car (marble). The other group had difficulties at the beginning to prevent their cars from falling from the rails. Later they worked out a better way to lay out the rails and their project became successful.

Within one class period, each group succeeded in building up their group projects. On Friday, Dr. White will let them set up their projects again, encourage each group to share

their understanding of the three laws of motion, their applications of the theories into their projects. They will also discuss how grades 2 – 4 students could be able to create their projects using the same laws of motions.

My final conclusions: Dr. White is an excellent and experienced teacher, responsive to student participation and savvy about student knowledge and skills. I learned a lot from the ways he set up the groups and provided detailed guidelines for groups to build up their projects. It was a pleasure to be in the class and to observe Dr. White and his students engaged in cooperative learning.