While the above is a very well-known idiom, it is neither polite nor accurate. It implies ignorance and a lack of effort required to be a member of the educational discourse community. However, leading a mind and imparting new concepts is not as easy as it sounds. Specifically examining kindergarten elementary education, teaching requires a lot of planning, writing, interacting, communicating, and managing. Educators engage in various types of textual communications, adopt different identities and encourage a student to success. These obligations are all very specific to education as a whole, but they individually contribute to the academic goals and standards that define kindergarten as a grade.

**What is a "discourse community"?**

Unfortunately, to discuss the discourse community of a kindergarten teacher and to develop a thorough understanding of it, a person must know what a discourse community is. John Swales, a professor of linguistics, asserted that a discourse community must have six defining characteristics:

> ...broadly agreed set of common public goals...mechanisms of intercommunication among its members...participatory mechanisms that provide information and feedback...possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims...acquisition of specific lexis...a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

(Swales 471-473)

In correlation to the definition of a discourse community, James Paul Gee, a professor of reading, introduced the concept of Discourses. To Gee, a Discourse was the “‘saying-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations’...of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words...values...attitudes...gestures...and clothes” (Gee 484). Essentially, Discourses are the assorted roles a person may play in any given discourse community. It is the hand of cards that are unique to them that they possess and offer to the world.

A simpler, more familiar definition may be that a discourse community is a heterogeneous group of like-minded people working towards a specified goal, using various devices to enhance communication and participation. Likewise, a Discourse is the role in which you assume in a particular discourse community. Another term for these Discourses could be identities.

**Types of Texts Commonly Used**

Undoubtedly, elementary education teachers participate in daily acts of writing. Whether scribbling notes to themselves, writing their name broadly across a board for their students to refer to, or grading homework assignments, teachers are unable to escape communicating through the written word. However, a few texts are particularly obligatory to the education field, those that “come with the job.” These often include, but are not limited to, lesson plans, report cards, and evaluation rebuttals.

*Lesson Plans*
A lesson plan is ultimately the path that a teacher leads their students on to achieve their academic objective. Lesson plans provide the teacher with an organizational tool. Frequently, they offer accountability to staying on track in the teacher’s endeavors and a reference to consult. Most often, the lesson plans are weekly calendars filled with planned activities according to each day. It is a very informal reference with neither objective of lesson or materials needed listed. Tory Mobely, a kindergarten teacher in Upton, Wyoming at Upton Elementary, explained in a personal interview that she starts planning on the Wednesday before the upcoming week. This ensures staying up to date with the student’s pace of learning, yet still being thoroughly prepared beforehand.

The above is an example of a possible lesson plan template for elementary education teachers.

**Report Cards**

Every nine weeks, teachers are required to publish report cards. The reports are just as they sound, being a record of the student’s progress throughout the previous six weeks that teachers and parents are able to reflect upon and express any concerns they may have about possible developmental delays. It measures the student’s mastery of kindergarten standards of achievements on a four to one scale, four being proficient, three being progressing at grade level, two at needs more time, and one being below grade level. Ordinarily, at the top of the page, the report will feature the student’s name, the teacher’s name, and the school year. Other information may be provided, such as the birth date, attendance record, and grade assignment, or none may be provided at all. The report is split into columns and rows that are categorized by school subjects (social studies, language arts, etc.). It covers both general and specific standards, evaluating each student’s individual performance.

This is a typical report card template.

**Evaluation Rebuttals**

About two times a year, the kindergarten teacher’s principal will complete an hour and a half observation of the teacher and her classroom. During that time, he will look for how well the teacher stays on track in
her curriculum, how she interacts with her students, and similar professional critiques. Oftentimes, the principal will return with an evaluation form in which he noticed an unsatisfactory performance. He will then request her to rebut, or prove, the ways in which she does comply with the academic standards of her school. This is frequently in the format of a form with a question asking for proof. The teacher is more than likely to respond with what they call “artifacts”. These are files containing evidence of students’ progress (perhaps the successful completion of the written alphabet) and a typed statement asserting which lessons she achieved what standards. Although this particular instance seems negative, if you were to think of the principal’s request in proportion to the frequency in which he evaluates, a thorough demonstration proving their accomplishments is hard to witness in just two visits.

Language of Teaching and Subsequent Identities

Teachers may often find themselves having to shuffle between their identities daily throughout their career in the education field. At any given moment, a teacher may be guiding a student, meeting with a parent, or working alongside a superior. All of these instances require different expectations from the teacher in regard to their use of language, body gestures, and posture.

Teaching Techniques

All teachers, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary, face one major challenge: bridging the gap between each student’s individual learning styles. Not every student learns the same way or at the same rate. A teacher has to always be aware to provide her students with a variety of learning styles. She needs to employ various methods of learning to ensure that she is giving the opportunity for every student to learn according to his individual ability. In addition to assisting different learning styles, an educator has to execute some classroom strategies to help maintain organization and management.

Teaching Theories

Behaviorist

Most commonly known from the study of psychology, “behaviorism” uses positive and negative reinforcements to condition a student’s mind for learning. Teachers use behaviorism to refine basic skills and the foundations of learning. Some classroom activities that can be seen using this theory of learning are rote memorization, drill and practice, and games. (“Behaviorism: Learning Theory”, “Behavioral Theories”)

Constructivist

Oftentimes, a student may find it easier to understand a concept when allowed to take control of his learning with the teacher acting as a guide. He may use his own experiences to develop meaning and refer to the teacher only when he needs a fresh outlook on an idea. Theorists call this type of learning “constructivist learning theory” (“Teaching”).

Cognitivist

The last theory, “cognitivism”, focuses on explaining a student’s learning ability by attributing learning to the thought processes of the mind (“Cognitivism and Constructivism”). Instead of focusing on observable
behaviors or personal experiences, it takes into consideration the brain’s active participation in learning and its subsequent results.

http://www.teachersgarden.com/professionalresources/learningtheorists.html

(This link leads you to website providing a table outlining the various learning theories in history and their creator.)

Teaching Strategies

Sometimes referred to as “soft skills” of teaching (those acquired through years of experience and trial and error rather than years in college), these strategies are not often recognized as part of the job requirements of teaching. However, to fully master membership in their discourse community, elementary teachers have to learn these skills as well. Some of these focus on classroom management, including the constant reminders for them to line up single file or answering the never-ending questions. Others revolve around keeping each student’s homework and assignments separate and organized. Each teacher implements a preferred system to maintain organization in his or her classroom (this may be a folder, cubby, or basket system). Lastly, keeping children engaged through the duration of school hours can prove to be quite a challenge for the teachers.

http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-strategies

(This link leads you to a website abundant with ideas for classroom management to meeting educational objectives.)

Conclusion

Knowing the expectations of this discourse community equips the prospective teacher with a comprehensive outlook of teaching as a career. It provides them the opportunity to weigh the responsibilities of the job against the long-term desire of a stable occupation.

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