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**Final reflections about Basic Concepts at Blomvlei Primary School**

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I am so grateful for Basic Concepts because it allowed me an entry point to public schools in South Africa. The impact this program has on teachers and students was evident from my attendance at Basic Concepts trainings and my immersion at Blomvlei Primary School. From the in-person training I attended, I noticed teachers were engaged throughout and felt that what they were learning was *actually* applicable for the students’ learning. As someone who mediated with Basic Concepts, I appreciated the individualized attention learners received, which in turn built trust between the mediator and the learner - making the learning process different from the typical classroom experience.

One component of my internship consisted of learning about Basic Concepts’ management as a nonprofit working in partnership with South African school districts. I began my time attending the Learning Support Teacher Training at Metro South District. What I got out of this training was an understanding of how bureaucracy inundated teachers with work. Teachers expressed their opinions about how much of this work was not going towards helping the students. On the second day of the training, however, there was more emphasis on how to diagnose a child who may need additional support. During these sessions, I encountered many curious teachers who wanted to know what I was doing in schools. I think teachers quickly saw that I was somebody who had not gone through teacher education programs yet I was working with students. As I attempted to best explain what I would be doing at Blomvlei, I understood that I did not really know what to expect from the school or the students.

If I met these teachers now, at the end of my internship with Basic Concepts, I would be able to articulate a clearer explanation of what I was doing in the classroom. And perhaps I could also reassure them that the work I conducted with students was not just material that I introduced without any experience or professional support.

Since December, I started Basic Concepts’ online course. Here I learned about the theory which Basic Concepts is grounded in, and I learned about how the mediation takes place between the learner and mediator. To help with the sessions, Louis and I worked together on my first session planner for the color blue; then I was provided with feedback on future session planners I wrote. In these session planners I outlined the activities and the mediation questions I’d ask. In addition, I created a list of vocabulary words that I would want to emphasize during my sessions. I found this vocabulary list to helpful because it helped me keep focus on the material, and these words also served as indicators for me to test whether students were understanding the material.

From these sessions, I also picked up on how the context in which I introduced material made it difficult for students to contextualize. For example, the internalization activity I had planned for the color red consisted of the kids imaging themselves inside a grocery store picking red fruits such as tomatoes and strawberries. Yet the learners seemed lost; they were unable to tell me about the setting they were imagining. After the session, Lynette suggested I modify my session for the following two groups because many of these kids do not go to grocery stores with their families due to safety concerns.

I would not have picked up on this detail had Lynette not pointed it out. In addition to those observations and feedback, she conversed with me about the challenges learners faced at home and how that impacted their academic performance. This was tough to grapple with as I carried out activities that required basic school supplies (crayons, pencils) and I had learners who did not have those materials. While I appreciate school districts for working with Basic Concepts–a program that aims to change systems (in this case, how early childhood education is taught)–I noted that perhaps conversations also need to be had with teachers/principals about how these ‘smaller issues’ can be solved so that students have the tools to engage and feel confident around their peers. At Blomvlei, I could speak with Lynette about these issues, and I found her compassion for the kids admirable.

Lynette is an experienced teacher, and she is also familiar with the Hanover Park community. Basic Concepts introduces a new teaching practice, and I believe it becomes more effective when a teacher/mediator can also understand the family/home circumstances of these students. This is how meaningful relationships are built between the students and teachers, and how children’s confidence is supported. As someone who is not from Hanover Park or has not experienced the trauma and poverty of this community, I think that Basic Concepts’ small group structure helped me build relationships with students. Eventually I was able to be a more effective mediator as I gained trust with students.

From the group sessions, I picked up on students’ personalities, and tailored my mediating to fit those child’s needs. There were some students who were very shy but eager to participate. For these kids, I understood that I had to prompt them to speak. There were other students who needed the questions repeated or asked in different ways for them to understand. Then there were kids full of energy, who constantly needed something to do. For these different types of learners, Lynette gave me some tips on how to engage them and hold them accountable for their learning.

Towards the end of my internship, I attended additional Basic Concepts training at Metro South District. There I interacted with foundation phase teachers who were *actually* excited about this training. I think that speaks to the value that teachers find from this training. Last year I worked at the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy Education (SCOPE). I worked for a project that aims to improve professional development trainings with California public school teachers. Through this project and the conferences held, I found teachers are interested in workshops that enhance their teacher performance and not add to the administrative tasks they already have.

My experience with Basic Concepts allowed me to engage with students in a nontraditional learning environment. It was nontraditional in the sense that I worked with small groups of students and had a non-rote teaching style. These two things paved a path for critical thinking and learning. At the end of my time at Blomvlei, teachers gave feedback on student’s performance, and pointed out students who had grown immensely during the eight weeks of learning through Basic Concepts. I left feeling hopeful about these students’ futures. Lynette has passion for her job, and I’m certain learners will receive the help they need from her through Basic Concepts. In my last two weeks, students were starting to ask when Lynette would pull them from class!