**Betelhem Dereje**

**(Stanford University Intern)**

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**Basic Concepts**

Slide 1 - Hello and thank you for taking the time to come today. So before I left, I wanted to show you all what I’ve learned from your generosity in making a space for me in your school and from this programme. I thank you for opening this space for me to grow and learn and hopefully I have returned the same favor to your students, the Basic Concepts Unlimited Programme and this school.

Slide 2 - I’ll start with a brief reintroduction of myself, my name is Betelhem Dereje or Miss to the students and I was born in Ethiopia and immigrated to the States with my parents at a very young age. Their one dream for me, and later for my brothers, was for us to have a quality education and become something in life as they hadn’t been given the opportunity to do. So they always pushed me in terms of my education and looking back I’m really thankful that they didn’t make it easy for me because that’s what got me to where I am now. I am a Stanford student, as you know, studying abroad and the reasons I chose Cape Town at first were unclear and probably not the best. It was the only program in Africa, but I also knew and was curious about learning more about its rich history. Since being here; however I know I made the right decision because what I have learned and experienced, and the ways in which I have grown while being here have been invaluable. Everything from finally learning how to cook for myself to understanding the danger of a single story and the complex process of healing that comes after a country has endured trauma. I’m a little sad that I’ll be going back so soon but I know that I have gained so much from being here and I will take it back with me and continue to learn from it. I am majoring in either political science or African and African American studies with a minor in education. I tutored a lot in high school and now in college and my brothers as they were growing up, and it’s recently that I realized that I was invested in the future of our children and really wanted to make a difference in the field of education. So this internship was really helpful in pushing me to think about what I’d want to do moving forward.

Slide 3 - With the previous coursework about Vygotsky and Piaget and other education theorists, I found that using the Basic Concepts approach, I was able to directly implement what I had learned and more in the classroom. In addition, I was able to bring about its practicality through its mediational and cognitive approach by providing teachers with a framework meant to develop the students’ cognitive functioning and information-processing capacities. I didn’t fully know what to expect when sending in my cover letter, but any opportunity to work with children in the Foundational Phase wasn’t one that I wanted to pass up. And learning more about the basic concepts programme itself, I was able to see what it had already accomplished and the potential it would have as its being more widely implemented.

Slide 4 - Going in, I was very nervous, Hadley made me feel more at ease, but I couldn’t help all the what-ifs running through my head. What if my lesson plan wasn’t enough? If I mess up would they notice? Would they respect me less? What if they didn’t listen? What if what I was teaching them wasn’t what was best for them? Sitting at that first staff meeting, I felt really good about being involved in the school in such a different way and I was still nervous, but I felt it made me feel like a real teacher. The first few days, I was still trying to figure out what the students knew and didn’t know, which was kind of difficult because each of them had a different learning style and I hadn’t dealt with that before. And it was always trial and error, I could have something planned but have to alter it and adjust it to their needs and what they responded to best. Their continuous excitement and curiosity reminded me, however, of why this was important to me and I did have my doubts about whether or not I was doing the best or the most I could, but Louis was very reassuring in that I couldn’t have been expected to get everything on the first try and it would take some time.

Slide 5 - I’ve kept a portfolio of some of the work they’ve done with me, while there’s been a lot that they’ve taken back with them. But together, we went over three main domains, colour, shape, and size. We drew a lot together, show them some things. They were very enthusiastic about reading and math, certain students more than others, so I would try to incorporate that into some activities when I could. There was a point where they weren’t ready for the lesson I had planned for the day, so one of the students, Gregwin joked about being teacher and I told her to be the teacher which was great because one of the best ways to solidify learning is to teach it to one another. So she got up and they all sat down to listen to her, and it worked! She traced the shape like I did, asked everyone what it was multiple times and they responded – it made me feel really proud because I was able to see the fruits of my labor.

Slide 6 - There have been many ups and downs during my time here as well as many unprecedented challenges that I’m still trying to work through, along with a lot of progress and proud moments that I’ve had of them.

I asked them to draw their best triangle in one corner after we tried to find triangles in the classroom. Most were a lot more successful than when I asked them to find squares. They drew their best triangle. Tiffany wasn’t sure how, so I gave her a block to copy and then we did the corners and I realized that Rodney needed a lot of help. This entire time he’s been out of his seat, bustling around the classroom and I’m beginning to see that it’s because he doesn’t understand what we’re doing. So, I came and sat next to him and as I was giving instructions to the whole group, I was also able to help him. He still has trouble understanding what corners are and so I had him trace the triangle and square multiple times and draw the dots (we both did) to have him connect them which, by the end definitely helping his understanding at least a little bit.

There have also been many questions of discipline, they listen to me for the most part, but once their boredom hits, it can be tough to keep them in their seats or doing what they’re supposed to. There have been days where they playfully fall out of their seats or they disregard what I’ve told them and go to draw on the chalkboard, but I’ve also tried to take things like that and incorporate it into their lesson plans.

One of the other students, Caitlin was also a student that did really well for a bit and then started to get bored, and one day wouldn’t listen to anything I was telling her, but then I was able to have a one-on-one with her where I went through everything again. And towards the end of the session, I let her know that I wasn’t happy with how she’d behaved in our sessions and reminded her that our time together was limited, and that extra attention along with me telling her that we need to listen to each other to get as much out of our time together as we can helped both of us. I realized she needed more attention than the other students and the next day she was encouraging the other students to listen to me.

Slide 7 - I again want to emphasize my appreciation for having been given the space to do these reflections and have the experience of working with such amazing young students and the Basic Concepts Programme. I enjoyed learning from them as well as from all of you and will take away a lot from what I’ve done here. I learned that sometimes listening is the best policy, but there is power in being firm as well, which Hadley had to remind me was important. I already had immense respect for teachers, but if anything, this has shown me in a limited first-hand account, just how much they do. I do think that because the program is originally made to last longer, it might help both the students and the next intern if there were more sessions. Because I only saw the students twice a week, it was difficult for them to remember and for me to continue from where we left off. Also, fewer students in each group, during the last week Louis advised that I try taking smaller groups and I found that to be significantly more effective which may have to do with my ability to manage large groups. In addition, I feel that it also helps the mediator to be able to give attention to and spot where students may need that extra help.

I might also recommend having a UCT/Stellenbosch/local university student to do the internship program, as they would be able to commit to a longer time period and be more invested in the process.

Overall, I feel like a lot of what I’ve gained has come from the reflective process, both what I’ve done with Louis and by myself. This kind of active reflection and metacognitive thinking has been what has allowed me to succeed with the students.