**Teaching Diverse and Low Income Students in a**

**Combined Grade Classroom with Limited Resources**

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Mrs. Beth Kromer, who taught a combined 4th and 5th grade class at Ruby Bridges School during the 2015-2016 school year, describes her school as the most diverse and least resourced school in the City of Alameda. She wryly comments that students from low income families walk through a neighborhood of upper middle class families to attend school while many of the children who live in that neighborhood leave everyday to attend better resourced schools elsewhere.

Her students are diverse in many ways besides grade level. About half are English language learners, many of whom have as their primary language a language other than Spanish or Cantonese, two languages common in Alameda County. Many are itinerant students who drop in and out of school anytime during the year if the Coast Guard reassigns one of their parents. A few also have learning disabilities.

Mrs. Kromer, who has no teaching assistant but 14 years of experience teaching and a decade or more of experience in the commercial sector, uses several independent or student-centered learning strategies to teach her diverse students. Every trimester, she introduces a new discovery education project that students work on independently either individually or in small groups. She uses multiple strategies to go beyond rote procedures and develop an understanding of math principles in her students. These strategies include real life math problems, visual bar models and hands-on tape measures. She also is proud of the class kitchen where students measure ingredients in various ways to make their own pumpkin pie and other delicacies. And she stated emphatically that students must learn their multiplication tables

To develop language skills, she employs scaffolding and provides students with reading materials matched to their skill level. For example, she obtains daily news reports on items of interest to students from New Language Arts, with publishes editions of the daily news that match different grade levels.

Mrs. Kromer is innovative as well. To address a concern that her students from lower income families don’t have the vocabulary of their counterparts from higher income neighborhoods, she identified the most common academic words and posted them prominently on a wall in her classroom. She teaches one of those words each day to students, who then compete to identify those words in their class reading throughout the year.

Ms. Kromer implied that she prefers to modify and use standard curricula, when available, to teach her diverse students in two grades. She will be using a new math curriculum next fall, but is compelled to create her own reading curriculum as the State of California has not yet developed one that supports the common core standards. The science curriculum is in flux as it evolves gradually to support the Next Generation Science standards.

Her students have occasional access to Google Chromebooks delivered on carts from the school’s resource center. Thus computers remain primarily a supplement to instruction rather than an integral part of it. As few parents of her students access websites, she puts little effort into maintaining her classroom website but does use a classroom computer occasionally for multi-media presentations.

As I was leaving her classroom, she emphasized the importance of making expectations clear to students in rules, procedures and routines. She then pointed out to me a detailed procedure for using the sink posted prominently near the sink. She will review her rules, procedure and routines this summer and then direct students to accept them during the first week of school.

Mrs. Kromer’s dedication to her students is perhaps her most important teaching attribute a good model for candidate teachers. This fall she has agreed to allow the author, a candidate teacher, into her classroom to observe her teaching for 12 months.