

Transcript of Rachael Asay Interview

Interviewer

Tell me your name and spell it.

Rachael Asay

Okay. It's Rachael Asay. R-a-c-h-a-e-l, A-s-a-y.

Interviewer

And your job here at Woodrow Wilson Elementary is what?

Rachael Asay

I teach full day kindergarten.

Interviewer

Full day kindergarten. Tell us about your environment here that this is a Title 1 school. Most of your kids that come in, at least in this class -- give us a profile.

Rachael Asay

I teach all-day kindergarten. I have 20 students, 19 of which are ESL students which means they speak a language other than English at home. I have 15 Spanish speakers, two Nepali, one Burmese and one Bosnian child. Yeah.

Interviewer

So are some of these children refugees?

Rachael Asay

Yes, I have three who have refugee status this year.

Interviewer

What country?

Rachael Asay

Two are from Nepal and one is from Burma.

Interviewer

We're doing a documentary on refugees. We've been featuring the high-quality preschool through Granite District. Tell us what you see in your class. Who has had this preschool training and who taught it to them through your school.

Rachael Asay

So we have a preschool in our building and it's taught by a teacher named Miss Allison. And I have five students who came from her this year. And they are above and beyond my other students. They know how to write their name. They

know how to listen. They know how to follow transitions. They know the routine of school, just the pace, what a teacher expects from them. And they also know how to cut. They know how to listen. They can know their letters. They know how -- their numbers. They know how to write. And they also have their parents more involved. Their parents know what to do. With homework at home, they read with them every night and that's a stark contrast from my kids who don't have preschool who couldn't even hold pencils when they came in at the beginning of the year.

Interviewer

How do they help other children in your class?

Rachael Asay

They're able to model. So I turn to them for behavior expectations such as modeling. "Boys and girls, look at this student, they're sitting nicely." And nine out of ten times that child is a child who went to preschool so they already knew that behavior. I turn to them for, "Oh, what is this number?" If I ask a question about numbers for instance I can say "What is this number?" And those children were already taught that so they know how to answer that question. They know their letters. But mostly it's behavior and academic things that I turn to them for.

Interviewer

How do you teach children who cannot speak English?

Rachael Asay

I use pictures. I model.

Interviewer

For the kids who can't speak English, this is how I approach teaching.

Rachael Asay

For the kids who can't speak English I model. I will act it out. I dramatize it a lot. I use pictures. I use repetition. And that's mostly how we do. We do things about five times for each normal thing that I would have to say once to a native English speaker. I have to say about five times for kids who don't speak English.

Interviewer

So full-time kindergarten for these kids is probably really necessary.

Rachael Asay

Yes.

Interviewer

Talk about that.

Rachael Asay

In all day kindergarten, since we do have the time, we repeat things five times which allows them to learn that English that they wouldn't get the chance to if they were only here half time. So throughout the day, I teach things multiple times. I can hit it in different aspects. I can hit literacy and math, I can hit math language during other times of the day. I have a chance to integrate all of our subjects which helps them learn their English.

Interviewer

And are they ready to learn for first grade?

Rachael Asay

I communicate with the first-grade teachers a lot about what the expectations all that they want the kids to come in with first grade and they always come back and say the kids who have all day and who went to preschool really are ready to learn and do far better in first grade than children who didn't have preschool. Didn't come from preschool.

Interviewer

How many kids from preschool?

Rachael Asay

I have five kids who went to preschool in my kindergarten class. But throughout kindergarten it's about half of the kids in kindergarten who went to preschool.

Interviewer

Half of the kids who have had preschool through this district are in kindergarten ready to learn and will therefore be in first grade.

Rachael Asay

The kids who have had preschool before they came into kindergarten are the kids who are ready to learn in kindergarten and are also ready to learn in first grade.

Interviewer

What is the cost for you in the class when a kid comes in and doesn't have those skills?

Rachael Asay

The cost for me as a teacher is time. I have to do everything five times as many times as I would normally have to. So every skill that I'm teaching I have to teach again and again and again. Not just once, twice, but up to five, six times just so they can learn how to do those basic things even walking in a line, reading a book, sitting still, cutting. I have to teach those again and again. Which I normally wouldn't have to if I had a class of kid whose came from preschool.

Interviewer

So does preschool help them teach English well?

Rachael Asay

Yes. The kids who come from preschool know quite a bit more English because they've been around it. Just getting them in an environment that English is spoken, and especially academic English, they're able to pick up on English quicker and they know more vocabulary.

Interviewer

What are the skills taught in kindergarten to get them ready for first grade?

Rachael Asay

We teach letter naming and letting sounds. We teach counting to 100, number recognition, number sense which can they recognize that five means a quantity of five. We teach high frequency words that are common in reading. We teach fine motor skills, gross motor skills, social norms and expectations of what to be in school.

Interviewer

They were very polite in line.

Rachael Asay

I teach them those social norms from day one. I set up an expectation of this is how school is, this is what we do, and they need to follow that.

Interviewer

Tell me about your kids. You must love children to be able to do this. What do you love about this age?

Rachael Asay

I love that they're so willing to learn. They love everything. You put something in front of them and they're excited to learn whether it's math, reading, like English, language, science, they love everything about it.

Interviewer

And what's their favorite curriculum?

Rachael Asay

Their favorite curriculum? Their favorite curriculum is probably math. They love the hands-on, they love that. They get to manipulate it, that it's concrete. That they get to use counters or anything fun that they can really move around by themselves.

Interviewer

Why should people care about preschool and these kids?

Rachael Asay

I think preschool and kindergarten is really important to our society because these children are our future. And the more chances that you can get them to learn earlier, the better off they're going to be, and succeed in later grades. So if they have a strong foundation then they will have a strong everything else. If they can learn in preschool, and they can learn in kindergarten, they will be able to master those concepts in first and second grade. And also, they start -- these kids are all bilingual so why not foster kids who are not only bilingual, but also know a lot of everything.

Interviewer

And you have to have a special love for these kids.

Rachael Asay

Yes, very much. I love these children so much. They teach me so much more than I could even imagine, as much as I teach them, they're teaching me. They teach me about their culture, they are able to just bring out this joy in me and everyone who meets them.

Interviewer

You want to see them succeed.

Rachael Asay

Yeah, I really want to see these children succeed and grow up and surpass what anybody has the expectations of them to do. I know that these children can succeed and I hope that we can continue to help them grow because I know that all of them have the potential to do so.