

**Bass Team - Education and Human Development: Project Bright IDEA
Visit to Brunswick County: Town Creek and Lincoln Elementary Schools**

Date of Visit: Monday, October 14, 2013 and Tuesday, October 15, 2013

Team Members: Margaret Gayle, Dan Turner, Jackie Terrell – SSRI

Students: Dan Li and Nina Thomas - Days 1 and 2; Ray Li and Tai Chen – Day 2

Historical Perspective

Duke University collaborated with Brunswick County Schools since 2005 when the district was selected to participate in the first Bright IDEA cohort of the Javits Research Project funded by the US Department of Education to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the American Association for Gifted Children.

Project Bright IDEA 2 – Grades K-2

Javits Cohort-1 - 2005-2008 – Belville and Lincoln Elementary

Javits Cohort-2 - 2006-2009 – Supply Elementary

Project Bright IDEA - Scale-Up: Grades K-5

2009 - Opening of Town Creek Elementary as a Bright IDEA school

2013 – 2014 - Lincoln and Town Creek – Model Demonstration Sites open by November 1

2013 – 2014 - Bolivia, Supply, Union and Virginia Williamson Elementary Schools

October 14, 2013

The visit to Brunswick County Schools was timely for two reasons: 1) to announce the opening of two model Bright IDEA sites, Lincoln and Town Creek Elementary Schools; and 2) to have the Bass students interact with teachers and administrators and observe students in Bright IDEA classes.

The Project Bright IDEA team arrived at Town Creek ES at 10:00 am. The team was invited to attend a group meeting of teachers and administrators in the media center. (Monday was an optional teacher workday. Staff members had given their time to meet with the team members.)

Mrs. Helen Davis, Director of Elementary Education for Brunswick County Schools welcomed everyone and stated how pleased they were to have the Duke students to come and meet their teachers and students.

Margaret Gayle introduced the Bass Team and discussed the purpose of the new initiative on Education and Human Development at Duke University.

Walker Constantinesco, Principal of Town Creek and Retha Rusk, Principal of Lincoln ES shared information on demographics and other data about their respective schools.

Mrs. Gayle discussed the Project Bright IDEA Model and the components that would be demonstrated for visitors during on-site visits and she stressed that the focus on model classes would be to demonstrate teaching Building Thinking Skills, Habits of Mind/Gifted Behaviors and Task Rotations by Learning Styles and Assessment.

Many of the questions from teachers were on the decision to incorporate the BUILDING THINKING SKILLS PROGRAM into the weekly classroom schedule for a minimum of three times per week. Mrs. Gayle responded by talking about the importance of the program for providing students with the “keys” to understanding five analysis skills and background vocabulary and knowledge and the critical discussion by students about their thinking in the classroom setting. Dan Turner discussed the significant results of the schools in Wake County

that had just used the BTS Program and no other components of Bright IDEA. The teachers requested additional training on using the Building Thinking Skills materials and a decision was made that training would take place on Saturday, October 26, 2013. Staff members from both Lincoln and Town Creek will attend the professional development opportunity.

After the initial meeting, the Duke Team broke up into three groups and they were free to meet and talk with teachers, including the Exceptional Children Teachers, in all areas of Town Creek ES. Bass students were engaged in talking with teachers and observing posted class schedules, reviewing student work, and reviewing the types of student materials available.

At the end of the day, the team met briefly with Walker Constantinesco, Principal and Helen Davis, Director, Elementary Education for reflections about their visits with teachers.

The Duke team arrived at the Holiday Inn Express, which is located within a short distance from the school. The team met for dinner at 6 pm at the Italian restaurant, *Eddie Romanellis*. The Duke team was joined at dinner by Walker Constantinesco, Helen Davis, Faye Nelson, former Brunswick County Curriculum Director and Deborah Allers, a Bright IDEA teacher-trainer.

The team informally had an opportunity to discuss observations of the day and to dialogue concerning the vision the school and system leadership has in mind.

October 15, 2013

Duke team members arrived at Town Creek ES at 9:00 am. The school system had invited Coastal Channel News, Channel 14, to interview and video a cross-section of classrooms featuring task rotations. Margaret Gayle was interviewed to provide a brief overview of the project and to mention the Bass Connection and Duke student involvement in the project. The clip and information appeared on Channel News 14 TV on October 15.

The team continued to observe classrooms and to interview staff members. Teachers expressed concern over their classroom schedules and resource classes and difficulties for having enough time for instruction with all their students.

The team departed Town Creek ES for Lincoln ES at approximately 11:45 am. Upon arrival at Lincoln ES, the team was greeted by Retha Rusk, Principal, who provided a lunch for the team and guests. During lunch, the principal provided an overview of the school historically and how the perception of the school has changed from being negative to being extremely positive. Ms. Faye Nelson provided the students an overview of her involvement in Project Bright IDEA and also discussed the demographics of Brunswick County. The principal is completely immersed in the theory and practice of Bright IDEA and is totally confident in the teachers and students in her school. Project Bright IDEA has continued in the school since being involved in the research project, 2005-2008. The standardized test scores continue to show positive gains over the past 5 years. The principal and school district staff credit Project Bright IDEA with these results.

The team walked around the school and visited many classrooms. They talked with teachers, students, and staff members. Work displayed showed a high-level of thinking skills and *Habits of Mind* information.

It was noted how involved the Duke students were in asking questions of teachers, students, and administration officials about the positive atmosphere and high-quality of instruction and student involvement. Team members were able to observe classes being taught in thinking skills and high-level instruction as a regular part of the school day.

The Duke team departed Lincoln Elementary School at 4:10 pm and traveled over to Wilmington to have dinner and to debrief. The team ate at *Elijahs*. There was interesting and scholarly dialogue among the team concerning the visit. Also, team members were able to get to know each other better and to interact on various topics related to student majors and particular interests – both academic and personal. The team departed Wilmington at 6:30 pm headed back to Durham arriving back in Durham at 10:00 pm.

SUMMARY

We believe the purpose of the Education of Human Development concept and community involvement was evident during the two-day visit to Brunswick County Schools. The Duke students gained an understanding of many of the complexities of working and operating within the public schools. They also learned about the Exceptional Children Program and the requirements of an individual education plan (IEP). Students had access to Duke personnel, school and central office personnel and felt comfortable and free to ask any questions they liked about the project. The field visit helped them to focus on their involvement in Project Bright IDEA and the specific areas they want to investigate. The Duke students seem to have a better understanding of the Bright IDEA Model and the research project they will choose to be involved in through the Bass Connection theme.

During class on October 22nd, the students, who were able to visit, indicated that they observed some of the components of Bright IDEA and they had numerous perspectives on the different experiences with teachers, administrators and students. They will develop a group presentation on their different perspectives to date for Dr. Martin Zelder, which will include their Duke class experiences, Brunswick visit and research projects.

Submitted by:

Margaret Gayle and Daniel Turner, October 17, 2013