Samantha Loomis

**Field Experience Summary and Reflection**

 My observations during the past few weeks have opened my eyes to the life of a middle school teacher. I experienced some of the pros and cons of teaching at the middle school level as well as what it’s like to teach at different types of schools (small private and large public). I have developed my understanding of the changes that occur during adolescence and how these changes affect students in school.

 My first experience in the classroom was substitute teaching at Crestview Academy. This is a very small, private Christian school, which was very different than anything I had ever experienced. I taught seven different classes (in a row!) each day: Math 6, Science 5-8 and Spanish 7-8. It was nice to experience teaching variety of grade levels and subjects. There was not a single moment there that I was bored or wished time would go faster! I did not even have time to be tired. One of the advantages of working at a private school is that there are fewer serious behavior problems, because students who continually misbehave can be expelled from school.

 The teacher I observed at Byron taught seventh grade life science four times a day. This gives her a chance to improve and make changes as the day goes on. At Byron, I appreciated having other science teachers around to collaborate with and ask questions if needed (at Crestview, I was the only science teacher). One definite advantage of working at a larger school is that you usually have access to more technology. Next year Byron students will be getting IPads! Crestview students do not have email addresses and there is only one class set of laptops for the entire middle school. Because Crestview's technology resources are limited, the students miss out on important skills such as the use of email.

 One disadvantage of working in a larger school is that the class sizes are also much larger. One class I observed had 32 students in it! This can be particularly difficult during labs when students may require more help.

 It was clear from observing that adolescents have strong needs to be very social and active. Although these can lead to behavior problems, they can be used to aid in their learning. I was lucky to observe a teacher who able to incorporate these needs into her class activities. Addressing these needs also helps students with different learning styles. Group activities encourage socializing and help those who are auditory learners. Hands-on activities allow movement and help students who are kinesthetic or tactile learners. All of the classes I observed at Byron included many group and hands on activities.

 In both experiences, middle school was a much happier place than I remembered. (Although may experience was somewhat clouded by the fact that my school had no windows). What I loved most about middle school students was their ability to make me laugh. Almost every single day a student would say something funny enough to make me laugh out loud. At Crestview, I was very surprised by how appreciative and affectionate my students were. I am not sure if that is something unique to that school or if it is common for middle school students. Students at both schools were generally enthusiastic about science.

 One thing that is difficult about teaching middle school students is that explaining why something occurs may be far beyond the level that they are able to understand. Although it is not required, knowing why something occurs can help students retain the concepts. For example, I can tell students that mutations occur, but they are more likely to retain this information if they understand how this could occur during DNA replication.

 Looking forward I am very excited to observe and teach at Mayo High School beginning this fall because I will get to go more in-depth with the content. It will also be nice to work with students who are more diverse both culturally and economically. I will be interested to observe the differences between the biology and honors biology students (I expect they will be huge). Though I have learned so much during the past few weeks, I know I've got a long ways to go.