

Creating an Environment for Learning

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Portfolio Entry for Wisconsin Teacher Standards Three and Five

EDUW 694 Classroom Environment

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Wisconsin Teaching Standard (WTS) 3: Teachers understand that children learn differently.

The teacher understands how pupils differ in their approaches to learning and the barriers that impede learning and can adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of pupils, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities

Knowledge

- The teacher understands and can provide adaptations for areas of exceptionality in learning, including learning disabilities, visual and perceptual difficulties, and special physical or mental challenges.

Dispositions

- The teacher believes that all children can learn at high levels and persists in helping all children achieve success.

Performances

- The teacher makes appropriate provisions (in terms of time and circumstances for work, tasks assigned, communication and response modes) for individual students who have particular learning differences or needs.

Wisconsin Teaching Standard Standard (WTS) 5: Teachers know how to manage a classroom.

The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Knowledge

- The teacher recognizes factors and situations that are likely to promote or diminish intrinsic motivation, and knows how to help students become self-motivated.

Dispositions

- The teacher is committed to the continuous development of individual students' abilities and considers how different motivational strategies are likely to encourage this development for each student.

Performances

- The teacher engages students in individual and cooperative learning activities that help them develop the motivation to achieve, by, for example, relating

lessons to students' personal interests, allowing students to have choices in their learning, and leading students to ask questions and pursue problems that are meaningful.

Danielson's Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

Component 2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

Element - Student Interaction

Pre-Assessment

Self-Reflection Assessment of Classroom Environment Related to WTS 3&5

I have been a teacher for 14 years. My current position has me teaching in a Catholic School system of approximately 400 students. Students in our system are very diverse. 85% come from a middle class family. 4% come from families that the government would consider wealthy. The rest come from families that are receiving some sort of financial assistance. Roughly 9% of our High School students are international students. We do not have any students with severe learning or physical disabilities. However, there are a small number of students that study and learn with the aid of an I.E.P. Most, if not all of the I.E.P.'s that I see in my studio classes are for students that need extra time for assignments.

I teach Physical Education for the K-5 students along with Health for grades 3-5. In addition, I teach High School electives in Physical Education and Art. The K-5 grades each have two classes that are around 18 students. The High School electives vary in size. The studio Art classes are usually around 12-15 students. The Physical Education classes can be anywhere from 12-36 students in size.

For this reflection, I want to focus on the environment in my High School studio Art classes. These 10-week elective classes can potentially pose a dangerous setting based on the materials and tools used. It's imperative that safety is a top priority in these classrooms. We use sharp tools, acetylene torches, a firing kiln, saws, drills, buffing machines and toxic acidic mixtures. If used inappropriately or carelessly all of these can pose a threat of injury.

Consistency is a key to managing the environment in our studio Art classes at our High School. There is another Art teacher in the High School, so it was important that we have the same classroom guidelines. She and I sat down and used Danielson's Framework for Teaching, Domain 2 as a guide and set up classroom policies that are clear and strict. The expectations of each student are clearly defined. Our policy plan gives each student responsibilities, such as cleaning their working space and tools at the end of each class period. We demonstrated the proper use of the materials and tools and made it clear that any usage different than what was instructed would require intervention. We both agreed that if the lessons were engaging and moved along quickly by setting fair but appropriate deadlines that the students were less likely to act inappropriately because they'd be more invested in the work rather than being off track. The studio elective Art metals does however present particular challenges in the management of some classroom procedures. The class often requires me to be one-on-one with a student in a separate room from the rest of the class. The casting machine and soldering torch are in a small room off from the main classroom. Monitoring classroom behavior is a challenge during these occasions.

We have two studio art rooms and their layouts are similar. We arrange five tables together to create one large working area. The cabinets and drawers are labeled with what is in them. Specific working areas such as metal buffing

machines, drill areas and clay wedging tables, have the procedures and safety guidelines posted near them reminders.

Another main aspect of my classroom management is my rapport with my students. I want the students to know me and I want to know them personally. I am in a very unique position in my system because most of the kids that I teach in High School are kids I've known since they were in elementary school and even younger. I've been privileged to see these kids grow up. I know them, and they know me. There's a level of trust and understanding that we have developed over time and it helps a lot in how they act around me and how I treat them. They know I care about them. I feel this is important because if they know and understand that I truly care, then they'll realize that any rules or guidelines I have for them in the classroom is because of no other reason than I want them to be safe and to succeed.

I've always made a conscious effort to not only allow but strongly encourage social interaction between the students themselves. I want them to talk to each other. I want them to collaborate. In fact, collaborative inquiry is a major component to almost all of my lessons. Here's an example: Last quarter I taught a studio ceramics class. The first student that finished our first project of the quarter, I took and did a one-on-one demonstration of the basics of using the potter's wheel. The students that I empowered through mentoring then taught the next person that completed the project the basics of the potter's wheel. I stood by and watched to fill

in aspects that were lacking in the instruction but the student's did the teaching. The subsequent students were then taught by the student that preceded them. It's so interesting because the students are able to offer possible solutions to difficulties in working on the wheel that I may not have been able to because they have a completely different perspective of the machine. In addition, the students act more responsible because they earned some control. They were doing the instruction. They were actively engaged in what they are learning and how they were taught.

Essential Question to Guide Learning Process and Growth

How can I create an environment where students with dyslexia feel comfortable enough to learn?

Synthesis of Research

There are two notions prevalent regarding the reading disorder dyslexia: it is very common and it is commonly misunderstood. People with dyslexia have a normal capacity of intelligence and possess a normal desire to learn but have a difficult time with reading, reading comprehension, pronouncing words and writing words. According to Susan Barton (2014), in many cases, students with difficulties in these areas will develop anxiety about participation, homework and test-taking. These factors impact their ability to learn. According to The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity (2015), there are many common misconceptions about

dyslexia. One is that dyslexia is simply where a person sees letters or words backwards. This may be true in some cases, but there are several different characteristics of this reading disorder.

My teaching position is somewhat uncommon in that I teach all age students. I teach K-5 Physical Education, 3-5 Health and High School Studio Art classes. In my current teaching position I do not have a student that has been officially diagnosed with dyslexia. I do know however, that many of cases of this disorder go unconfirmed. It is important for me even as a Physical Education teacher to look for and recognize even slight signs of dyslexia in my students because even though there is less reading or writing in my classes compared to their other classes, students with the condition could have trouble following simple directions. Instructions that pertain to the students left or right, ones that follow a sequence or a pattern and ones that require students to process information quickly could all pose a threatening environment for students that have even a slight form of dyslexia.

When I was a sophomore in High School, I was diagnosed with slight dyslexia. I have a first hand understanding of the struggles and stress someone feels trying to learn with the condition. What I want to learn from my research are ways to accommodate students with dyslexia that I may encounter throughout my career so that I can provide an environment where they can express themselves and learn.

The most commonly diagnosed learning disability, dyslexia is identified most often in males. However, researchers such as Susan Barton (2014) believe that dyslexia affects males and females equally. Furthermore, we can find cases of dyslexia in all corners of the world. Dyslexia is believed to be caused through genetics and usually begins at an early age. However, it can occur later in life usually as a result of a brain condition or affliction such as a stroke, traumatic brain injury, dementia or anything that would cause the brain to have problems processing a language.

Like many diseases or disorders, early diagnosis is important. The earlier learners are found to have this problem, the easier it will be for them to learn as they get older. Early signs that a student has dyslexia can include difficulties remembering letters of the alphabet trouble remembering their own name or mispronouncing familiar words. As a person gets older, signals could include starting a math problem from the wrong way or problems remembering basic sequences of patterns (Yale Center, 2015). A diagnosis is made through a series of tests of a learner's memory, spelling, ability to see, and reading skills (Reading From Scratch). The analysis of the results need to be handled carefully because if a student scored poorly in any of these areas it would need to be determined that it is not the result of hearing or vision issues or simply poor instruction. Those cases would point to an entirely different issue aside from dyslexia.

In nearly all cases the symptoms cannot be cured. Learners with dyslexia are treated by adjustments or accommodations developed by a support team to fit the needs of the student. Poor spelling, reading and handwriting skills all hinder a student's ability to learn and suppress their individual expression. Their lack of a grasp of these skills that are a result of dyslexia can be supported in very specific accommodating ways. Barton (2014) suggests that if an instructor uses lecture as part of their instruction, pauses or breaks inserted into a lecture to allow the students time to process the information presented can help immensely. Teachers should always be conscious of putting students with dyslexia in situations where they are uncomfortable. Reading out loud in class, spelling bees, writing on a board that can be seen by everyone in the classroom, letting other students correct their work, and calling on them in class without their permission are all situations that can cause extreme anxiety with these students and should be avoided. Barton (2014) also advises that a teacher creates an environment where students feel unafraid to make mistakes. This will go a long way in easing the anxiety of all students, especially those with dyslexia. Dyslexic students that read slowly can work with reading specialists and in the meantime be accommodated by being allowed to listen to books or other readings on audio tapes during lessons where the content of the reading takes precedence over the skill of reading. Spelling issues should be handled by teachers that are trained to teach spelling in different ways because while teaching

it through memorization does not work with dyslexic students, teaching these students to sound out the words is the best practice (Barton, 2014). It is recommended that when the student is working with a specialist the normal classroom teacher should not grade his or her spelling. Teachers could also shorten the length or alter the format of homework assignments and exams for dyslexic students they take longer than most students working on an assignment. Oral testing and extended time taking exams are also options. A teacher should also consider accommodating to the strengths of the students. Barton (2014) also recommends allowing them to express or show their learning in areas that they excel. For example, a student who is strong in art may be given an option to create a poster for an assignment instead of writing a report. A teacher that creates songs, acronyms, or some other sort of visual form helps dyslexic students with their memorization. Staying away from open-ended questions that can seem like endless choices for answers also helps. Questions with two or three possibilities will aid in their memory.

If accommodations are not made, the stress caused by fear can make it impossible for the student to succeed and they often develop anxiety disorders. A student that is chronically under distress simply wants to survive in the classroom without being humiliated, and a student with that mindset cannot and will not learn.

However, if the correct accommodations are made based on supporters understanding the condition, a student with dyslexia can thrive in the classroom.

Professional Implications of Research

I think that I've always been good about creating accommodations for students that I knew needed help. My research has made me understand that I need to be vigilant and look for signs in students that struggle with specific concerns. I need to realize that they could be struggling because they have a level of dyslexia that is undiagnosed and are in need of some accommodations. In this case accommodations will be made and tried. These students then will be monitored closely to determine whether the accommodations are making a difference. Instead of dismissing the struggles to misbehavior, poor listening or ineptitude the students are provided alternative ways to learn. The frustration felt by the student and me can be avoided or relieved if I implement this new approach. The approach will also create a more positive learning environment because the learners will feel more comfortable and have less stress.

Research-based Action Plan

Action Plan Summary

I will approach the school year with the intention of collaborating with our reading specialist to draft a checklist of things to look for in my students to recognize ones that may be affected by Dyslexia (Artifact 3). If I have a student that has been officially diagnosed with the condition I will implement that students' IEP to accommodate them in their learning. In addition, I will continue to observe all of my students with the aid of the checklist, especially ones that seem to be struggling in certain areas of my instruction. Students that struggle with directions involving symmetry, following patterns, rapid instruction and self-expression are signs of people with dyslexia. I will then accommodate these students the best way I can to allow them the opportunity to grow and learn similar to every other student.

Anticipated Implementation

My Specific plan will include:

1. The first step of my plan is to meet with our reading specialist before the school year starts. Included in the meeting will be finding out whether we have any students that have been diagnosed with dyslexia. If we do I will accommodate the students' need in accordance with their IEP. I will also try to become aware of other students that she is working with and find out what troubles in reading they have to determine whether those struggles may overlap in my class (Artifact 1).

2. The next step is to closely observe and document students that show signs of dyslexia (Artifact 2).
3. For these students slight modifications will be made in attempt to change their performance. Accommodations may include changing pace of the instructions, allowing for more comprehension time, varying the words and patterns used or allowing students to display their understanding and proficiency in alternative ways (Artifact 3).
4. Documenting the results to determine whether the accommodations are aiding the students first with frustration and anxiety and then ultimately their performance. I will compare the average scores of an assignment from last year when accommodations were not offered to scores from the same assignment this year were accommodations were given as choices for the students. Higher scores will indicate success in the approach (Artifact 4).

Anticipated Outcomes

My anticipated outcome in my Elementary PE classes is that in general the atmosphere of the classes will be more positive. Specifically student's frustration and fear will be relieved because they will understand that I am working with them to find ways to get them to comprehend my directions and follow the instructions the way they were intended.

Another outcome would be that I would become more aware of the needs of my students with dyslexia. This would result in an atmosphere that is better suited for them. The trust between myself and the students will also improve because they will know that I am doing everything I can to help them.

Post-assessment: Reflection

What Worked (or anticipate what will work) and Why

1. The students that struggled in the areas of reading and written expression seemed to immediately show signs of relieved pressure. Students that struggle often feel they do not have the necessary means to overcome their issues. The students that were provided options displayed less stress and were more relieved. Their focus was on learning instead of survival. Their academic performance improved (Artifact 4).

2. The overall atmosphere of the classes will be impacted because the students will be more relaxed and I am more relaxed as well. The entire class will be more relaxed because my focus will be on the entire group instead of one or two students that are struggling. My frustration is relieved because I am more flexible with my instruction because the students have more options to fulfill requirements. Instead of only offering one that may not suit all of the students, they now can choose an option that they are more comfortable with. The students stress level and their performance will improve with the appropriate accommodations in place because they are

provided options for them to display their understanding of the lesson without the fear and anxiety of being forced into a situation where they are unable to perform.

What Did Not Work (or anticipate what will not work) and Why

1. Attention needs to be given to the ease at which the accommodations are provided to the students. The students sometimes feel that other students are given special or preferential treatment and the atmosphere of the class turns drastically. One thing to note is that most instructional strategies that are good for special needs students are also good for all students. If I implement the strategies seamlessly, then students will not notice that there is any special or preferential treatment.

2. Students sometimes resist accommodations because they feel that there is something wrong with them. The trick to this is to develop a clear environment that each student understands that they are individuals. They need to realize that they are individuals that will make mistakes like everyone else does. They need to understand that it is normal that everyone learns differently. If they know these facts, the accommodations will not be viewed as a crutch but as and merely an alternative way to show their skills.

My Next Steps

1. Searching for new ways to offer alternative or multiple ways for all students to express themselves or display what they've learned is an ongoing process. I intend on attending a seminar on accommodation, modification and adaptation of curriculum this summer.

2. Ongoing discussions between the students' regular homeroom teachers, special teachers and me should continue to refine options in dealing with struggling students and also to share data. Art and Physical Education are areas that reading and writing are often secondary to the lesson being taught. Our school has set goals on student's literacy so I simply cannot ignore the skills. However, on selected lessons and projects, adjustments can be made that allow students who struggle with reading and writing to have a better chance of succeeding by displaying their understanding of what they need to have learned.

Artifact 1

The following is a copy of the meeting notes from the meeting I had with our elementary guidance counselor and our school reading specialist to discuss students that could possibly have dyslexia and need accommodations.

Meeting Notes 8-28-14

In attendance – Eric Wedemeyer, Jenni Berg and Sam Pitch

Jenni presented class lists

New students: Devin Benish, Kane Collins, Sienna Hayley, Esme Andersen

Jenni and Sam presented and discuss new IEP for Joe Larson

Eric asked Sam for a list of students that she'll be working with

Eric asked Sam for help on creating a checklist of things he can look for in his classes, Sam will assist

Eric asked Sam to assist in creating accommodations for students with reading and writing struggles

Eric, Jenni and Sam engaged in a discussion on links between students reading and writing struggles and their overall academic performance

Follow up meeting set for Oct. 13

Artifact 2

This artifact is an observation checklist that I use for students that are struggling in the areas of reading and writing. The criteria that are checked are also symptoms of dyslexia. The intent is not to prove anything or diagnose a student with dyslexia but to gain information as to why a student may be struggling and accommodate accordingly.

Classroom Observation Checklist

Grades 3-5

Reading (Basic Reading Skills, Reading Comprehension, Reading Fluency Skills)

- Age Appropriate (grade level)
- Confuses similar-looking letters and numbers or similar-looking words (i.e., beard, bread)
- Has difficulty recognizing and remembering sight words
- Frequently loses place while reading
- Reverses letter order in words (i.e., saw/was)
- Demonstrates poor memory for printed words
- Reads slowly
- Has trouble naming letters
- Has problems associating letters and sounds, understanding the difference between sounds in words or blending sounds into words
- Guesses at unfamiliar words rather than using word analysis skills
- Substitutes or leaves out words while reading
- Has poor retention of new vocabulary
- Dislikes and avoids reading or reads reluctantly

Notes: _____

Written Language (Written Expression)

- ___ Age Appropriate (grade level)
- ___ Writing is messy and incomplete, with many cross-outs and erasures
- ___ Has difficulty remembering shapes of letters and numerals
- ___ Frequently reverses letters, numbers and symbols
- ___ Uses uneven spacing between letters and words, and has trouble staying 'on the line'
- ___ Copies inaccurately (i.e., confuses similar-looking letters and numbers)
- ___ Spells poorly and inconsistently (i.e., the same word appears differently other place in the same document)
- ___ Has difficulty proofreading and self-correcting work

Notes: _____

Artifact 3

The following artifact is a 3rd grade Health lesson. The lesson ends with the teacher assigning the class a written report that the students are to write about themselves in a narrative format that relates to the lesson. They can opt to write a descriptive short paper on themselves or prepare a “commercial” of themselves and present it. Another option is to create a “poster” of themselves and display that to the

class. Accommodations in the lesson are highlighted in yellow where students that have difficulty with expression in writing due to dyslexia can choose to fulfill the requirements of the lesson in an alternative form.

Unit/Theme – Developing Good Character

Lesson # 1 (3rd grade) – Self Concept

Objective: To understand the relationship between self worth/respect and good health.

Teacher Goals:

- To define Self-Concept and Self-Esteem
- To explain why it's important to have a positive perception of yourself

Student Goals:

- To develop a better awareness of their own talents and skills
- To develop a better awareness of their strength and weaknesses
- To understand their heredity

Materials used: Power Point display, Body Image, the Media and Other People Handout

Lesson Procedure:

- The teacher define Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Self-Ideal
- Teacher will lead a discussion on talents, strength, weaknesses and heredity
- Teacher will lead a discussion on personal dreams
- Teacher will talk about and explain dream developers and dream killers
- Teacher will pass out and explain the Handout
- Students will work individually answering questions 1 and 2 from the handout
- Teacher introduces the assignment for next week – “Writing about Me”

- “Commercial of Me”
- “Poster of Me”

Artifact 4

The following are copies of two separate years of grades for the same assignment on the same lesson. The first one is from last year from the assignment in artifact 3. The second is from the same assignment but from this year. This year's assignment has the additional options for the students to choose from when completing the assignment. The comparison of the two, show the better scores as a whole for the entire class for this assignment.

SUBJECT Mrs. Miller - Health Period Beginning Me
 Period Ending Me

Grade 3rd
 Semester _____

1st WEEK	2nd WEEK	3rd WEEK
17	19	17
19	18	19
18	16	18
16	16	17
6	14	20
14	18	18
20	16	18
18	20	17
16	18	156

SUBJECT Ms. Goulding - Health Period Beginning Me
 Period Ending Me

Grade 3rd
 Semester _____

1st WEEK	2nd WEEK	3rd WEEK
16	14	16
16	18	20
14	11	10
18	12	14
20	18	18
11	18	18
10	20	10
14	10	16
18	159	159

SUBJECT Mrs. Eckwight - Health Period Beginning Me
 Period Ending Me

Grade 3rd
 Semester _____

1st WEEK	2nd WEEK	3rd WEEK	4th WEEK
20	17	16	20
17	20	18	16
16	16	17	14
16	17	20	18
17	18	18	18
14	18	20	19
20	18	18	19
18	18	19	18
18	19	19	170

SUBJECT Mrs. Miller - Health Period Beginning Me
 Period Ending Me

Grade 3rd
 Semester _____

1st WEEK	2nd WEEK	3rd WEEK	4th WEEK
20	16	19	20
16	20	19	20
19	20	19	19
20	19	20	20
20	19	20	20
20	19	20	20
20	19	20	18
20	20	20	18

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