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Goal 2: Reflection Paper

**Demonstration of Understanding of Learners and Learning.**

***Understanding learners and the process of learning is one of the fundamental pillars of education.*** As teachers, we must constantly strive to see each of our students as unique learners with their own specific means of achieving and demonstrating understanding. Graduate school has taught me as much about myself as a learner as it has the process of helping my students learn. It has helped me understand that the student and teacher often have vastly different goals and priorities. That it is easier to help my students be successful if I can align what I need to teach with the students’ interests.

Starting on the first day of school, I examine each individual learner from a holistic view point. I attempt to discover their academic, emotional, physical, and social development level. After determining their level, I then try to find a way to fit each student into my team of learners in such a way that everyone contributes and is supported by the team. This results in a safe and accepting atmosphere that allows each student to flourish as far as their own capabilities allow.

I have incorporated Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs into my teaching style and feel it is the cornerstone to teaching. Maslow’s theory allows me to understand the needs that must be met to allow students to become cognitive active learners in my classroom. Students are unable to become active learners until their basic needs are met and if any of their basic needs are disrupted they cease to be effective learners. For example, one of my students was having trouble concentrating in class and I discovered it was because she had a toothache. This pain caused her to cease being an active participant and become more of a distracted observer. I was

able to coordinate with her parents and our schools dentist to have her seen and after her toothache was resolved her concentration was restored.

***Applying principles of human growth and development throughout life including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development by designing developmentally appropriate learning experiences is my first indicator*.** This is a difficult topic to provide an example for but I have selected a lesson I have taught called figurative language. This lesson examines Robert Munsch’s collection of stories and his rich use of figurative language.

According to Piaget, the concept of figurative language requires a level of abstract thinking that most of my third graders are not developmentally prepared for yet. Most of my third graders are still in Piaget’s third stage of cognitive development, concrete operational, and not yet ready for fourth stage conceptualization. In order to teach the abstract concept of figurative language I attempted to bring it into a more concrete form. In order to do so I used concrete and familiar examples from Munsch’s stories that they could relate to from their own life experiences. This was a valuable lesson and my students loved it so much that next year I will teach it in the first month of school.

***My second indicator was selected to show how I developed strategies to support learners with special needs within the least restrictive environment*.** As I learned in Characteristics/Methods: Specific Learning Disabilities, most students with special needs can benefit from hands on activities. I try to incorporate hands on activities into as many lessons as possible to help meet my obligation to my special needs learners while still helping my regular education students. In project two I demonstrate this concept through the use of sketch to stretch, compare and contrast, tableau, read aloud and vocabulary graphic organizers.

In particular, I have found that Sketch to Stretch is an excellent way to measure comprehension in both my special needs and general education students. Sketch to Stretch have students draw quick sketches to demonstrate their understanding of concepts. For example, one of my LD students, Amber, has a reading Lexile of only 50L. By using Sketch to Stretch she is able to demonstrate a remarkable level of understanding and attention to detail that traditional assessment methods fail to capture.

***My final indicator attempts to show how I address the needs of diverse learners in terms of culture, race, gender, color, and language*.** My classroom do not offer much diversity in the form of culture, race, and color but does have diversity in language. While everyone in my classroom speaks English, the dialects vary and this can sometimes lead to confusion. To compensate for this I sometimes use Point of View (POV) to help connect new words and concepts to things they were familiar with through acting out scenes from stories that we read.

Project three describes how I used POV by having students act out the scenes in each chapter in The Knight at Dawn. When students play a character that they have read about, they discuss why they are going to act a specific way. They will refer back to the text and say something like “well the author wrote that Jack was hesitant before falling from the precipice, so he had to feel scared, brave and worried all at the same time.” The student playing Jack said, “That is the way that I see it playing in my head.” This activity helps every one discuss the story, and by acting out the scene it minimizes the differences students have in the way of language.