End of Semester Synthesis Essay

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EDU 320: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

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Becoming a future teacher we have learned several strategies, techniques, and ways to improve your classroom. We have learned many effective strategies, behaviors to look for, organization and assessment tools to use, and yet there are so many decisions to make. Creating and envisioning your future classroom takes a lot of time and requires you to weigh the options of how you will best reach each of the students in your classroom. The first thing to consider is why you chose to become a teacher. After you understand yourself as a teacher you will need to consider your classroom management style and how you want your class to be organized. As a a teacher you are responsible for getting to know all of your student and you will need to consider what type of strategies and instruction will best fit your students.

 Before deciding about your classroom setup, your management style, and assessment tools you want to implement, you have to think about what it is that made you decide to become a teacher. Loving your job, the students, and the school you work for will only make you a better teacher. You have to understand yourself and the beliefs you have as a teacher in order to positively impact your student’s lives. For myself, I would say that I truly love working with children and being able to make a difference in their lives. “To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world,” (Palmer, 1998, p. 6). This quote made me realize why I wanted to become a teacher. It really illustrates how important teaching is and the impact you, as a teacher, can have on a child’s life. You are able to influence and change the way they see the world, which means you are truly able to make a difference. To go along with making a difference you have to believe that every child is capable of being successful. The teacher needs to find the activities and lessons that best help each child, because they are all able to learn and grow in their knowledge.

“Resilient children are those who seem to defy the odds,” (Borich, 2014, p. 91). I think this is one of the main reasons that I want to become a teacher. As a teacher you have to be there to motivate, support, and believe in every one of their students. Every student is going to have come from a different background and family, but you as a teacher are able to impact their lives. Even since becoming an aide at Lincoln Elementary I have seen several times where if you give children, especially those with special needs, the opportunity they often will succeed. In my practicum there was a 5th grade student who has autism and he was able to score a 3 on the math testing without any modifications. This was not something they thought was possible with him, but after working with him and moving at his own pace they realized he was capable of it. This student is an example of getting to know your student, believing in them, seeing the potential, and pushing them to do their best so they are able to be successful.

 A teacher every day when entering the classroom needs to have a positive and supportive attitude. Several times when talking about the role of a teacher leaving your personal life at the door is something that comes up. You have to incorporate the person you are and what you believe into your teaching, but it also cannot get in the way of you doing your job correctly. One of my practicum teachers that I observed was raised Catholic and then was hired into the public school setting. She explained that you have to adjust your teaching style while still being true to who you are. She said that for her it was teaching about her faith without every using the word God. Remaining true to who you are and what you believe will only make you a better teacher because you are honest with your students about who you are.

In your classroom you always need to be there for your students. For some of your students your classroom environment will be the most consistent aspect of their lives. Teachers every day need to put a smile on their face, come to the classroom with a plan, and be ready for his or her students. “Enthusiasm is an important aspect of a teacher’s affect,” (Borich, 2014, p. 21). If you want your students to be engaged and excited to learn you have to be enthusiastic in the way you teach and about the material you are presenting them. A teacher always needs to stay positive for their students, no matter what is going on in their lives. In order to teach your students it is very important that they know that you value and are enthusiastic about what you’re teaching. Especially when working with younger students, they often times want to be just like the teacher, so if she loves math and reading they will too.

 Teachers need to be organized, but they also need to be flexible and willing to switch up their plan. A teacher has to be ready to change and adjust at any given moment because each day your classroom and the students in it will be a little different. Each of your students is going to unique and it is your responsibility to get to know all of your students. You want to know not only about how they learn best, but also about their likes, dislikes, and interests. The more effort you put into establishing a relationship the more effective your teaching will be with that student. “…there may be times when no amount of intervention and understanding in the classroom will seem to work, since the sources of the problem may lie elsewhere,” (Borich, 2014, p. 118). Knowing your students is probably one of the most important aspects of being a teacher. It is very important that you are there for your students. I have personally dealt with situations where a child’s background and family life has an obvious impact on their behavior and education. In my after school I dealt with a child who had a very difficult home life. At one point we even had to file a report so that changes could be made in the life of that child. It is often hard and sad to admit, but you have a responsibility to protect your students. There are certain aspects of your student’s lives that you are unable to change, but you still must be observant and there for your students. Getting to know your students depends on the relationship you develop with them. Creating and establishing relationships is an important part of a classroom along with clear expectations and structure.

Classroom management and the way you plan to run your classroom is another important piece of becoming a teacher. “Establishing rules and procedures to prevent classroom discipline problems will be one of your most important classroom management activities,” (Borich, 2014, p. 82). In almost all of my education classes this point has always been stressed. Several times I have heard that you have a 30 day teaching period at the beginning of every year. During these first 30 days or couple weeks you aren’t even that concerned with content, but you are working to teach your students the procedures and expectations of your classroom. This will make for a successful year long term and I think it is very important to do this. “…a set of techniques that requires anticipation by the teacher to prevent problems before they occur,” (Borich, 2014, p. 111). Anticipation is definitely something that we have been taught as a teacher. When creating lesson plans we have often been told to think through everything very thoroughly. You have to think of every possible aspect of the lesson you are going to teach your students. Teachers need to plan ahead and be purposeful in all that they do. I hope to establish and implement clear rules so that my students know what to do and what I expect. If you are consistent in your expectations your students will still be able to have fun and feel comfortable in their classroom environment, but still know what is expected.

 Another important aspect of teaching and classroom management is following through with what you say. “Do not establish rules you cannot enforce,” (Borich, 2014, p. 84). Implementing rules that you are able to enforce ties into many aspects of being an effective teacher. By following through and implementing your rules, you are establishing trust. If you follow through on established rules and consequences you, as a teacher, are able to be a consistent area in the student’s lives. It also allows your students to build your trust because they know you say what you mean. Students are better able to respect you when teachers follow through and respect and trust will only help to build the positive student-teacher relationship. An important aspect of classroom management is having a safe and inviting environment where your students feel safe. A classroom is a setting where students should feel challenged and know they are learning, but also somewhere they feel comfortable with who they are. If the student trusts their teacher they will be more willing to participate and be active learners.

The teacher has to find a way to engage their students and help them be driven to learn. There are many different teaching strategies including questioning, direct and indirect instruction. In my future classroom I hope to have a balance of all the various types of strategies because I feel that by incorporating them all you will be better able to reach your students. There are many different learning modalities, which means that the various types of instruction will serve different purposes and be more and less effective for different students. When working with elementary and early childhood students a large aspect of teaching is questioning. “Questions are the tool for bridging the gap between your presentation of content and students’ understanding of it,” (Borich, 2014, p. 227). I hadn’t thought about how important questions are in education. It makes sense though because whether it be verbal questions or questions on an assignment or test that is how you, as a teacher, measure the students comprehension and retention of the material. In several of my classes we have learned about different types of questioning techniques and when you should use them. I like the idea of sometimes asking whole group or small group questions because then you bring in collaborative learning and the concept of sharing ideas. When they share their ideas with a group the students need to listen to what others have to say, consider their perspective, and also be able to express their own idea and see how the ideas either work together or are different. Teacher need to be very intentional with their questions just as they are with other teaching strategies they implement.

Scaffolding and modeling are other types of instruction that I hope to incorporate in my future classroom. “Modeling is a teaching activity that involves demonstrating to learners what you want them to do or think. When used correctly, modeling can assist learners to acquire a variety of intellectual and social skills more effortlessly and efficiently…,” (Borich, 2014, p.270). Modeling is something that is very effective when teaching. With both younger and older students you often model and demonstrate for them the way you want them to work on or do the lesson. I think modeling is a technique that teaches children to be attentive because they need to listen and understand what you are doing. Modeling is also very useful for showing them your expectations. When working with young children, they often look up to you so if you model and demonstrate for you they will follow your behaviors. Scaffolding is another technique that is effective as a teacher because you build on your student’s previous knowledge. The teacher has to help the student make connections and deepen their understanding while making connections to the material.

Teachers are working to have students understand because you want them to succeed. In order to know where a child is at there is an established set of goals or objectives. Goals, standards, and objectives are large aspects of a teacher developing a curriculum. “…development of standards has been the awareness that instruction at all levels of schooling has predominantly focused on memorization, drill, and workbook instruction,” (Borich, 2014, p.134). After being in classrooms through practicum and being an aide I think this drive has changed a lot in education. I feel like there is less of a push to memorize, but now it is about applying and understanding the why. Even in subjects like mathematics in the fifth grade classroom I saw concepts like the big 7 and different strategies for multiplication that are more about knowing and understanding the why rather than just memorizing the answer. Math looked very different in classrooms today than it did when I was in school. Education is continually changing and therefore the strategies of the teachers change.

Teachers develop and create lesson plans, but they still have the foundational structure based on curriculum. “…found that teachers report spending more of their time planning instruction around the characteristics of their learners than around any other area of consideration,” (Borich, 2014, p.162). Teacher’s aren’t able to just teacher there students anything they want which is why there is a standard or basis for what teacher are required to teach. Even though there are guidelines about what to teach, the teachers have to make it relatable and applicable for their students. Teachers can have all the neatest most fun lesson plans, but if it is not relevant and engaging for your students they are not worth using. You have to adjust lessons and activities based on the students you have in your class because you have to adjust it to best fit them, but it also has to serve the purpose of meeting standards.

Engaging every student in your classroom means that you have to be aware of the different learning modalities they each have. It is important to create lesson plans that meet the needs of every type of learner. “…the learning tasks your students complete should be active, constructive, collaborative, authentic, and goal oriented (intentional),” (Borich, 2014, p. 218). I think this is very true and should be your goal as a teacher for every lesson. In an early childhood class I took we actually had to break down a lesson and look at what we did to meet the learning needs of each type of learner (See Appendix B). With every lesion you create you should look to reach each learning modality at least once. You want to teach in a purposeful way. If the lessons, activities, or materials you are using are not serving a purpose I think you need to rethink them. One aspect along with movement and hands on that can be incorporated is technology. When incorporating technology you want to make sure it is effective for your students.

Technology is a very important and useful tool that can be very effective if used correctly. “…with today’s generation of learners who are accustomed to visual stimuli and multimedia presentations,” (Borich, 2014, p.208). I think this has to go along with engaging and gaining your students interest. The current generation of students is used to having technology all around them in many forms so I order to reach them the teacher will likely have to integrate. Technology has become more and more a part of our lives so I think it makes sense that it should be part of the educational system. There are obviously still aspects where technology maybe shouldn’t be a part of the curriculum, but I think technology plays a major factor in the lives of many children. Technology integration has to be very purposeful. It is easy to incorporate technology, but it should always serve a meaningful purpose and improve the lesson or activity. As a teacher you have to mindful and thoughtful about the technologies you use in your classroom because the technology needs to be used as a learning resource. Technology is something that is a part of many students everyday lives so it could be a very useful tool to engage students. Technology also brings up the concept of socio-economic status. This goes along with knowing your student, but socio-economic status needs to be considered in your classroom. As a teacher you have to be aware of your students experience and availability of different types of technology. Socio-economic status is just one aspect of getting to know your students and their backgrounds.

Another important aspect of being an effective teaching is being informed about your students, their backgrounds, and cultures. Knowing your students will allow you to adjust and create activities that are relevant and meaningful to your class. “Before you actually write a lesson plan, consider two preliminary issues that are necessary for your unit plan to flow smoothly: (1) determining where to start and (2) providing for learner diversity,” (Borich, 2014, p. 179). I really liked this tip because I feel like planning a lesson plan can often seem like a daunting task, but if you break it down it becomes simply. I feel like the issue of determining where to start is important because you have to know where your students are and what background knowledge they have so you teach what is necessary. I also think considering providing for learner diversity is important because differentiated instruction is how you will reach each of the individual students in your class. To know whether or not your students are retaining the information and your strategies are being effective you are able to use different types of assessment including formative and summative.

Formative assessment would be a useful tool to see exactly where all of your students are. “The overall goal of formative evaluation is to improve your teaching based on data that comes directly from students and peer observation,” (Borich, 2014, p.399). Formative assessment is something that I think you can do rather frequently in your classroom. Formative assessment really helps guide your teaching and directs where you need to go. In early childhood classrooms for example the assessment tool may just be a checklist for an activity (See Appendix A). Appendix A is an example of a checklist that a teacher used after a read aloud and then the students were to draw a picture that required comprehension. I think it is a very valuable tool that allows you to see exactly how well or not your lesson went over and what the students were able comprehend. I think it will really help you improve as a teacher. As important as testing and assessment is, there is still more than just results of these tests to understand your students as learners. “Unfortunately, some teachers know little more about a student after testing than they did before,” (Borich, 2014, p.380). I think this is a very true and relatable statement. I think that how a student performs on a test can only tell you so much. Also depending on the type of test you really can’t necessarily see how the student got that answer. In a lot of tests the answer is right or wrong so unless you can see the students thought process the teacher doesn’t get a clear picture of where they are at. Just as every child may need to be taught in a different way, various forms of assessment may also be helpful.

When working with assessments there is often not much room for modifications or adjustments, but they still need to be considered. “Because the case of each child with a disability may be unique, assessment modifications appropriate for one learner may not be appropriate for other…,” (Borich, 2014, p. 415). I think that modifications are difficult because each student is different. I also think that it is difficult to know when you are able to make adjustments for students during a test. During my practicum there was a child who had autism and the teacher was able to type the answers out for the child and then cut them into pieces. Rather than writing out all the answers the student was able to glue down the appropriate answer. This was an example of how even an assessment can be modified to best fit the student.

 I have been able to observe in several classrooms at various levels and age groups. There are many commonalities, but there are also several differences. “…your learners’ attention spans, interest levels, and motivation will not be the same as those of older students,” (Borich, 2014, p.258). Even through practicum experience in a fifth grade classroom and kindergarten classroom the way you teach and the instruction you use is very different. It is very true that you need to be aware of attention spans and interest levels because you want your learners to be engaged in order to effectively teach your students. One commonality thought is that you always have to switch up the type of instruction you use. “A key behavior of the effective teacher is instructional variety. Variety in the modalities of instruction and instructional activity stimulates student thinking and interest,” (Borich, 2014, p. 188). In one of my early childhood courses we had to create and teach a lesson plan. After teaching it part of our reflection process was going through and looking at how we taught to each modality and then looking at how we could’ve done it better. When I was looking at my lesson I realized how many different activities you could do for one concept just to benefit each type of learning modality. I think it would require a lot of time and planning from the teacher, but there really is many ways to engage each type of learner so if you are aware and willing you should really switch up your instruction and work to reach each modality.

 There are several aspects that go into becoming an effective teacher. You have to be intentional with your classroom set up so that it is conducive to learning and communication in the classroom. You have to create lesson plans and activities that are relevant and engaging to every child in your classroom. Teachers have to be organized and intentional, and yet be flexible and willing to change and adjust lessons to better fit your students. Teachers have to be purposeful with every question they ask, activity they use, and strategy them implement. A teacher has many things to consider in creating their future classroom, but I think most importantly they have to love children and be passionate about helping them learn. As a teacher you have an opportunity to make an impact on life of every student you come into contact with. As a future teacher I hope I am able to see the potential in each of my students and help them recognize and believe in themselves. Whether it be through resources, support and talking, or trying many different strategies, I hope to find what best suites each child in my classroom so they know they capable of succeeding.

Appendix A

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| Task | http://texas.thefootballbrainiacs.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/X.jpghttps://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/90/Check_mark_23x20_02.svg/1081px-Check_mark_23x20_02.svg.pngOr  |
| Identified Shapeshttp://www.swintonfitzwilliam.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/shapes-2.jpg |  |
| Able to comprehend continuous numbers (ex: 5,6,7,8,9…)  |  |
| Identified Colorshttps://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/38/BYR_color_wheel.svg/2000px-BYR_color_wheel.svg.png |  |

Appendix B

Activity: CVC Word Recognition, Matching picture with word, and writing out the word.

Age Group: Kindergarten

Learning Activities/Materials:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Modality*** | ***What I planned or implemented:*** | ***What I could have added:*** |
| **Visual** |  I had enlarged pictures that the students were to identify and then match to the CVC words I had written on a flashcard. They were able to visually see the word and also an image for them to correlate to the word. Each word had three individual boxes which allowed them to visualize how many letters there were. The boxes with the vowels were red while consonants were black.  | One other thing I could’ve added was using the alphabet pieces (magnets) and had the students use those to create the words. Also I could’ve had additional pictures for all the words I used. I also think flashcards that had the picture and the word spelled out would’ve been helpful for the visual learners. Another thing we talked about working on with these students was fluency of the words so I think a string with beads and then moving the beads along the string to show how it flowed would be helpful for the visual learners.  |
| **Auditory** | I would verbally say the word aloud to the students and also have them repeat it aloud. I was trying to ask guiding questions that would require the students to repeatedly say and hear the individual sounds of the words. I would also break down each letter sound individually (what sound does the t say?) | One recommendation that Mrs. Bassingthwaite gave to me that I would like to use in teaching this lesson again is asking the questions in a different way. By switching up how the student hears the questions they will hear the sounds of the letters differently. Repetition would be another way or even recordings or songs that say the words would be helpful for the student to hear and listen to.  |
| **Tactile** | I used this a little in my lesson, but I should have implemented it more. I had the students use dry erase markers to write out the word. My plan was to have the students trace the letters of the word with their fingers before having them write it out.  | To better reach and engage my tactile learners I could have had them use different manipulatives. If they had playdoh, string, or sand they could either write the letter or create the letter using different materials.  |
| **Kinesthetic** |  I found this type of learner to be a little more challenging to reach. I thought that I could lay out the images and then hold up the flashcard and have the students reach to touch the picture that matches the word. Although it wasn’t whole body it required some movement with their bodies, especially their arms and fingers.  | I found several activities online that would be fun ways of incorporating kinesthetic learners. There were games like twister and hopscotch where the teacher could write the CVC words and have the students move to play the various games. If space allowed it might be fun to have the students use their bodies to be the letters of the word (the small group I had was three students so this would’ve worked nicely).  |

Works Cited

Borich, Gary D. (2014) *Effective Teaching Methods: Research-Based Practice Eighth Edition.* United States: Pearson Education Inc.