

Adolescent Learners and Diversity

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Immediately when I think of “learning diversity” I think of those students with special needs. There are no students with IEPs in the classroom I have been assigned to for my fall experience thus we have no aides in the classroom throughout the day. We have one student diagnosed with ED who joins our team for one period of the day, but he goes to history so I have no contact with that individual student. However, we have one student with a 504. This student is accommodated mainly by giving him more time to study, take tests, repeat testing if needed, and complete assignments. He is also currently separated from the rest of the class since he sits in the back of the classroom at a desk. This allows him to concentrate more on his studies and less on those around him.

We do have a few students in ELL. Those students are often not graded as strictly, depending upon the assignment and what each individual student’s capabilities are for writing and comprehension. One of the students from Haiti only attends the second part of science class since he is in ELL for the first part. Surprisingly, he is often graded on content since he seems to have a decently good grasp on English. He often asks for assistance on how to write something properly and my cooperating teacher takes the time to make sure he is doing okay in class. He does receive leniency on his spelling and grammar. We have another student who is from Somalia and is required to try all assignments but does not actually receive a grade like other students would. She often receives a completion grade only since she does not speak a lot of English yet. However, I have learned one very important lesson while working with my cooperating teacher. It is important not to have expectations set too low for students in ELL because they are still very capable students. My cooperating teacher does not ask for more than they can give, but she does hold them accountable for those things they can do. Just today an

ELL student was reprimanded for not doing a major project when she could have stayed after school for assistance or gone to her ELL teacher for help.

Although we do not have many special needs students in our classes, my cooperating teacher still makes accommodations for diverse learners. Under her supervision, I have been strongly encouraged to use hands-on activities in order to teach science concepts. She does not spend a lot of time on reading out of the book or taking too many notes. She keeps it general and concise. Often she will cover a subject using a variety of approaches (activities, notes, reading, projects, activity sheets, etc.) In addition, I have been required to provide both verbal and written instructions to all students. She encourages using graphic organizers as much as possible to help students with note-taking. She also utilizes scaffolding methods, often demonstrating first and then guiding them through the process until they can do something on their own. When students do projects, they are often given a variety of choices with which to choose from in order to meet the project requirements. This allows students to tailor their learning a bit more to their needs and interests. In addition, we have a few students who need prescription glasses but cannot afford it. These students are allowed to sit closer to the board when needed, although no one is assigned a particular spot for that reason alone.

As far as social development is concerned, students are allowed to work in groups during many activities so as to foster an environment of cooperative learning. Students get to choose their own work groups. Students are also able to help each other in answering questions in class. She does not mind a minor amount of side conversations as long as students are on task.

Students' personal development is fostered on a daily basis at William Ruffner Middle School. Every morning, announcements are made which carry some moral lesson and students are expected to listen carefully. My cooperating teacher makes a constant effort in asking what is going on in students' lives. She also keeps up with students' individual grades, often asking them

the reason for their performance or making a point to tell them that they did something well. She has also encouraged me to take students aside individually to ask them how everything is going and to ask them what would help them in their studies. My cooperating teacher is in constant close contact with many of the parents and keeps them up-to-date with their children's performance and behavior. I can tell students feel comfortable with talking with various teachers about what is going on in their lives. I have also observed the teachers and administration at the middle school being very accommodating and understanding with personal situations in the students' lives (providing lunch money at times, providing free lockers or materials, or allowing them to turn in something at a later date due to housing arrangements).

As a teacher, I will make sure I am aware of any IEP, 504, or ESL/ELL students that are in my class and I will make it a priority to accommodate those students accordingly. I will also continue to provide both written and oral directions because I have seen that students are less confused when they can choose which directions they can best follow. I have also found that graphic organizers and scaffolding methods are extremely helpful in students' following the lesson of the day and taking necessary notes. I will also encourage students to work in groups as much as possible, making cooperative learning essential in my classroom. I will make sure to touch base with my students on a regular basis, thus keeping up with their academic and personal lives. Lastly, the one thing I would like to continue to improve on in my classroom is being able to meet the needs of all levels of learners. Things can get pretty fast-paced and hectic in the classroom, and it is easy for some students to be left behind while others are falling asleep from boredom. Thus, I need to be able to provide activities and lessons that offer learning opportunities for all students. This could be done most easily by providing options.