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Knowing Your Students and their Learning Environment

a). Who are my students?

The school I am placed at, Attwood Elementary is located on the south side of Lansing and is full of culturally diverse students. I am student teaching in a kindergarten classroom with 20 amazing, unique, and diverse students. During the first week of school we did assessment tests on each student to see their ability level entering kindergarten. About half the students had received some type of prior education such as preschool or daycare so we were excited to see what our new students were capable of. Since I had no prior knowledge of what kindergarteners should know entering their first year I was not as stunned as my collaborating teaching Susan, after the assessments. Susan was amazed as to how little these students seemed to know. The assessment only looked at basic skills and some of our students did not even know how to hold a writing utensil.

Gradually as the year progressed we noticed four girls in the class were significantly ahead of their peers, constantly participating in all subject areas and demonstrating strong work in the classroom. Then there were about six students who fell into a middle range, while the rest of the class was still struggling to learn their alphabet. It was difficult to teach subject areas when half the class can not identify a letter let alone form one. However, one really neat thing our class had which Susan said her previous classes had lacked was unity. Our students are very caring and concerned with helping others out. While the different ability levels of our students differ no one seems to feel discouraged because all 20 of our students have grown confident in their own learning, participating daily. In order to make sure students are not falling behind we have formed learning groups during centers which adhere to the 3 different learning levels in our classroom.

Our class has students who fall on different ends of the behavioral spectrum. There are a few students who are constantly needing to be redirected and one in particular who often is a cause of distraction for the rest of the class. This one student will be a student where accommodations for certain lessons will need to be made during the social studies unit. For the most the student's show each other respect and therefore are well behaved respecting others ideas.

Attwood has self-contained classrooms, therefore we do not have special education students in the classroom. There are four students who see a speech therapist two times a week which has helped greatly with their development throughout the year. They are taken out of the classroom for 20 minutes during rest time so they do not miss out on academics. I do not believe any accommodations will need to be made for these four students during the social studies unit.

b). Student knowledge and interests.

The unit of *Communities and Economics* is somewhat new to these kindergartners. Kindergartners have prior knowledge of maps and how maps help us find our way to important places. This will hopefully help them understand the physical make-

ups of communities. Our students also have prior knowledge with the concept of wants and needs. Before Thanksgiving break we discussed things Pilgrims may want versus what they actually need.

To gain understanding of my student's knowledge and possible misconceptions I conducted a small group interview with four students in the class. Three of the students are academically strong while one requires more support in the classroom.

Questions and Responses:

What is a community?

Student A- Where you do homework

Student C- Where you get your homework folders.

Student D- Do work.

These answers led me to believe students are associating a community with our school classroom. This is helpful because when introducing communities I can start with explaining our classroom is a small community of learners and then expand from there.

What is a neighborhood?

C- When there is a-lot of houses.

A- Like a building where a-lot of houses are, like apartments.

C- Where there are ponds and ducks live.

B- Where a lot of houses and rivers are.

Students have a conceptual idea of what a neighborhood is I can expand on the physical aspects and start to encompass the people who make up neighborhoods.

What is a timeline?

C- The future.

A- A clock.

I figured students would associate a clock because of the word. Both students have somewhat of a basic idea of what a timeline may be, therefore it is important I really explain what a timeline is and its importance.

What is a family?

D- Where a-lot of people live together.

A- Part of your life.

B- They love your.

C- You live with them.

I thought students would have a basic understanding of what a family is and this shows they do. I feel like I will emphasis more on how all families are unique and how.

What are Community Helpers?

C- When people help others when they fall down and get hurt.

A- Help people.

This is another concept where I will have to be ready to give concrete examples and explain the meaning of what a community helper is.

What jobs do you know?

C- Ford work store and teachers.

D- Construction sight.

B- Serving food.

I thought students would reference jobs they are familiar with at home, which seems to be the case. I will need to be able to explain how some jobs perform services while others produce goods.

c). Classroom context.

- Students sit at tables at assigned tables with four to a table. Students who often times need to be redirected and become off task sit closer to the easel board and teachers desk.
- Students are grouped for literacy centers and math bags. Literacy centers have 5 students in a group. Students are paired up for math bags and they always have the same partner.
- Resources: class books, play center with manipulative, extra worksheets and writing materials.
- Routines: Social studies will be taught in the afternoon. The routine for after lunch is students have rest time where they watch a short video. Students know that once the video is over then learning begins again.

d). Linguistic, social and academic challenges, resources and supports.

For advanced students, which I believe at least 5 or 6 students will pick certain concepts up faster than others I will have extra work or activities for them to do. We will be working on an All About Me book in the beginning. If students finish a lesson worksheet early they can continue to work on their book. There will be at least one student which I will have to accommodate lessons to her ability level. She often become restless during lessons and distracts others. She also can not independently work on challenging activities. I will have to possibly have different activities for her to do if I feel she can not work with the rest of the class.