

SUBAREA I—STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Competency 0001 The teacher understands developmental processes and variations and uses this knowledge to provide instruction that promotes students' learning and development.

Skill 1.1 Recognizes developmental processes and how a student's development may affect performance

The teacher has a broad knowledge and thorough understanding of the development that typically occurs during the students' current period of life. More importantly, the teacher understands how children learn best during each period of development. The most important premise of child development is that all domains of development (physical, social, and academic) are integrated. Development in each dimension is influenced by the other dimensions. Moreover, today's educator must also have a knowledge of exceptionalities and how these exceptionalities effect all domains of a child's development.

Physical Development

It is important for the teacher to be aware of the physical stage of development and how the child's physical growth and development affect the child's learning. Factors determined by the physical stage of development include: ability to sit and attend, the need for activity, the relationship between physical skills and self-esteem, and the degree to which physical involvement in an activity (as opposed to being able to understand an abstract concept) affects learning.

Cognitive (Academic) Development

Children go through patterns of learning beginning with pre-operational thought processes and move to concrete operational thoughts. Eventually they begin to acquire the mental ability to think about and solve problems in their head because they can manipulate objects symbolically. Children of most ages can use symbols such as words and numbers to represent objects and relations, but they need concrete reference points. It is essential children be encouraged to use and develop the thinking skills that they possess in solving problems that interest them. The content of the curriculum must be relevant, engaging, and meaningful to the students.

Social Development

Children progress through a variety of social stages beginning with an awareness of peers but a lack of concern for their presence. Young children engage in “parallel” activities playing alongside their peers without directly interacting with one another. During the primary years, children develop an intense interest in peers. They establish productive, positive social, and working relationships with one another. This stage of social growth continues to increase in importance throughout the child’s school years including intermediate, middle school, and high school years. It is necessary for the teacher to recognize the importance of developing positive peer group relationships and to provide opportunities and support for cooperative small group projects that not only develop cognitive ability but promote peer interaction. The ability to work and relate effectively with peers is of major importance and contributes greatly to the child’s sense of competence. In order to develop this sense of competence, children need to be successful in acquiring the knowledge and skills recognized by our culture as important, especially those skills which promote academic achievement.

Skill 1.2 Analyzes how developmental variation among students affects instructional decision making

Knowledge of age-appropriate expectations is fundamental to the teacher’s positive relationship with students and effective instructional strategies. Equally important is the knowledge of what is individually appropriate for the specific children in a classroom. Developmentally oriented teachers approach classroom groups and individual students with a respect for their emerging capabilities. Developmentalists recognize that kids grow in common patterns, but at different rates which usually cannot be accelerated by adult pressure or input. Developmentally oriented teachers know that variance in the school performance of different children often results from differences in their general growth. With the establishment of inclusion classes throughout the schools, it is vital for all teachers to know the characteristics of students’ exceptionalities and their implications on learning.

The effective teacher selects learning activities based on specific learning objectives. Ideally, teachers should not plan activities that fail to augment the specific objectives of the lesson. Learning activities should be planned with a learning objective in mind. Objective driven learning activities tend to serve as a tool to reinforce the teacher’s lesson presentation. Additionally, selected learning objectives should be consistent with state and district educational goals that focus on National educational goals (Goals 2000) and the specific strengths and weaknesses of individual students assigned to the teacher’s class.

Skill 1.3 Demonstrates knowledge of how specific developmental factors may affect learning

Elementary age children face many changes during their early school years, and these changes may positively and/or negatively impact how learning occurs. Some cognitive developments (i.e., learning to read) may broaden their areas of interest as students realize the amount of information (i.e., novels, magazines, non-fiction books) that is out there. On the other hand, a young student's limited comprehension may inhibit some of their confidence (emotional) or conflict with values taught at home (moral). Joke telling (linguistic) becomes popular with children age six or seven, and children may use this newly discovered "talent" to gain friends or social "stature" in their class (social). Learning within one domain often spills over into other areas for young students.

Likewise, learning continues to affect all domains as a child grows. Adolescence is a complex stage of life. While many people joke about the awkwardness of adolescence, it is particularly important to remember that this stage of life is the stage just before adulthood. While people do indeed develop further in adulthood, the changes are not as quick or significant as they are in adolescence.

When we say that development takes place within domains, what we mean is simply that different aspects of a human change. So, for example, physical changes take place (e.g., body growth, sexuality); cognitive changes take place (e.g., better ability to reason); linguistic changes take place (e.g., a child's vocabulary develops further); social changes take place (e.g., figuring out identity); emotional changes take place (e.g., changes in ability to be concerned about other people); and moral changes take place (e.g., testing limits).

The important thing to remember about adolescent development within each of these domains is that they are not exclusive. For example, physical and emotional development are tied intricately, particularly when one feels awkward about his or her body; or when emotional feelings are tied to sexuality; or when one feels that he or she does not look old enough (as rates of growth are obviously not similar). Moral and cognitive development often goes hand in hand when an adolescent reasons behavior or searches for role models.

What do educators need to know about this? Well, first, it is important to be sensitive to changes in adolescents. Just because you see a change in one area does not mean that there aren't bigger changes in another area, hidden beneath the surface. Speaking of which, the second area of extreme importance is to realize that adolescents may be deeply hurt over certain issues that may or may not be directly related to the changes they are going through. It is particularly important for educators to be on the lookout for signs of depression, drug use, and other damaging activities, behaviors, or symptoms.

Skill 1.4 Applies knowledge of students' developmental characteristics to develop and evaluates alternative instructional goals, strategies, and assessments

The effective teacher is cognizant of students' individual learning styles and human growth and development theory and applies these principles in the selection and implementation of appropriate instructional activities. In regards to the identification and implementation of appropriate learning activities, effective teachers select and implement instructional activities consistent with principles of human growth and development theory.

Learning activities selected for younger students (below age eight) should focus on short time frames in highly simplified form. The nature of the activity and the content in which the activity is presented affects the approach that the students will take in processing the information. Younger children tend to process information at a slower rate than older children (age eight and older).

On the other hand, when selecting and implementing learning activities for older children, teachers should focus on more complex ideas as older students are capable of understanding more complex instructional activities. Moreover, effective teachers maintain a clear understanding of the developmental appropriateness of activities selected for providing educational instructions to students and select and present these activities in a manner consistent with the level of readiness of his/her students.

Competency 0002 The teacher understands how factors in the home, the school, and the community may affect students and uses this knowledge to create a classroom environment in which all students can grow and learn.

Skill 2.1 Recognizes how family patterns and the home environment may affect student learning

Unfortunately, many students come from past or previous exposure to dangerous situations. Child abuse may perpetuate itself in a phenomenon known as chronic shock. The system becomes geared up to handle the extra flow of hormones and electrical impulses accompanying the “fight or flight” syndrome each time the abuse happens, creating a shift in the biology of the brain and allied systems. Essentially, the victim becomes allergic (hyper-sensitized) to stress of the kind that prevailed during the period of abuse. Recent research indicates such a shift is reflected in brain chemistry and structural changes and may last a lifetime.

The abused child differs from the neglected one. While the neglected child suffers from under-stimulation, the abused one suffers from over-stimulation. The neglected child will be withdrawn, quiet, unanticipating, sedate almost, while the abused child may be angry, energetic, rebellious, aggressive, and hard to control. In each case, the environment of abuse or neglect shapes the behavior of the child away from home. Often, out of reflex, the child will flinch when seeming to anticipate a blow, or be unable to accept or understand healthy attention directed to him. The teacher merely needs to watch the child’s reaction to a sudden loud noise, another child’s aggression, or the response when offered some companionship by another child, or test their own feelings to sense what the child’s feelings and experiences may be.

The affective range of the abused and/or neglected child varies from very limited and expressionless to angry, to a distracted effect that is characterized by inattentiveness and poor concentration. Some are tearful, some angry and hitting, and some are just sedentary. In most cases, the effect displayed will not be appropriate to the situation at hand. They have just too much to think about in their mind, their sense of powerlessness is too strong, and unable to tell the terrible tale, they may block it out or become obsessed by it.

The obvious thing the teacher sees are marks from the hand, fist, belt, coat hangers, kitchen utensils, extension cord, and any other imaginable implement for striking and inflicting pain on a child. Now, the suspicion has to be backed up with hard evidence. Unusual marks in geometric shapes may indicate the presence of an implement for spanking such as a spoon, home-made paddle, extension cord, or coat hanger. Marks on the arms and legs may indicate being whipped there. Always be suspicious about bruising. Bruises on the neck and face are usually not the result of a trip and fall, but have a lot to do with intentional hitting, and even choking. Noting the size and shapes of bruises and using some simple imagination may reveal the source of the injury. Notice whether the bruise has reddened areas, indicating ruptured capillaries, or is uniformly colored but shaded toward the perimeter. The rupture of capillaries indicates a strong hit while the shaded bruise indicates a softer compression. The job of the educator who discovers this is just to have a reasonable suspicion that abuse is going on, but it helps to have some specific indicators and firm evidence, not only for the sake of the child, but also in the rare event that your report is questioned. Take note of the size of the injury. Compare it to something such as a quarter or an orange, etc.

The neglected child may appear malnourished, may gorge at lunch, yet still be thin and underweight. Quiet and shy, he's typically shabby looking, and doesn't seem to care about his appearance. Poor nutrition at home may result in him having more than his share of colds and it is of utmost importance to guarantee that his immunizations are current, as they probably have been overlooked. He is not usually a very social child, may isolate, and not respond to invitations to join in. Many children display this trait, but a persistence in social anxiety with a sad effect will indicate that something is happening at home to be concerned about.

In cases of sexual abuse the most blatant warning sign is the sexualization of the child. They become interested in matters of sexuality way before their development stage would predict. They are sexual. They may be seen to quietly masturbate in school at prepubertal ages, and may even act out sexually with other children of their own age. The child who suddenly begins to engage in promiscuous sexual behavior is likely to have been molested. Sexual abuse of children is widespread and takes many forms. Kissing episodes by a parent, when out of normal context, are just as damaging as more overt forms of contact, as is the sexualized leer or stare by a perverted parent or elder. Because of the complexity of dealing with sexual abuse, situations must be dealt with extreme care. Never attempt an exhaustive interview of a student who admits to being sexually abused, or abused in any way, but wait for the trained professional who knows the methodology to help out. The outcome of an interview can make or break a prosecution.

Significance of family

The student's capacity and potential for academic success within the overall educational experience are products of her or his total environment: classroom and school system; home and family; neighborhood and community in general. All of these segments are interrelated and can be supportive, one of the other, or divisive, one against the other. As a matter of course, the teacher will become familiar with all aspects of the system, the school and the classroom pertinent to the students' educational experience. This would include not only process and protocols but also the availability of resources provided to meet the academic, health and welfare needs of students. But it is incumbent upon the teacher to look beyond the boundaries of the school system to identify additional resources as well as issues and situations which will effect (directly or indirectly) a student's ability to succeed in the classroom.

Examples of Resources

- Libraries, museums, zoos, planetariums, etc.
- Clubs, societies and civic organizations, community outreach programs of private businesses and corporations and of government agencies
These can provide a variety of materials and media as well as possible speakers and presenters
- 1) Departments of social services operating within the local community
These can provide background and program information relevant to social issues which may be impacting individual students. And this can be a resource for classroom instruction regarding life skills, at-risk behaviors, etc.

Initial contacts for resources outside of the school system will usually come from within the system itself: from administration; teacher organizations; department heads; and other colleagues.

Examples of Issues/Situations

- Students from multicultural backgrounds:

Curriculum objectives and instructional strategies may be inappropriate and unsuccessful when presented in a single format which relies on the student's understanding and acceptance of the values and common attributes of a specific culture which is not his or her own.

- Parental/family influences: Attitude, resources and encouragement available in the home environment may be attributes for success or failure.

Families with higher incomes are able to provide increased opportunities for students. Students from lower income families will need to depend on the resources available from the school system and the community. This should be orchestrated by the classroom teacher in cooperation with school administrators and educational advocates in the community.

Family members with higher levels of education often serve as models for students, and have high expectations for academic success. And families with specific aspirations for children (often, regardless of their own educational background) encourage students to achieve academic success, and are most often active participants in the process.

A family in crisis (caused by economic difficulties, divorce, substance abuse, physical abuse, etc.) creates a negative environment which may profoundly impact all aspects of a student's life, and particularly his or her ability to function academically. The situation may require professional intervention. It is often the classroom teacher who will recognize a family in crisis situation and instigate an intervention by reporting on this to school or civil authorities.

Regardless of the positive or negative impacts on the students' education from outside sources, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that all students in the classroom have an equal opportunity for academic success. This begins with the teacher's statement of high expectations for every student, and develops through planning, delivery and evaluation of instruction which provides for inclusion and ensures that all students have equal access to the resources necessary for successful acquisition of the academic skills being taught and measured in the classroom.

Skill 2.2 Recognizes how school-wide structures (e.g., tracking, inclusion) and classroom practices (e.g., grouping, student-teacher interactions, acknowledgment of student achievement and progress) may affect students' self-concept and learning

Classroom climate is a significant influence on successful student learning, and interactions among, and relationships between, students is an important supporter of a positive classroom climate. In past classroom practices, it was common for students to be grouped according to ability. This practice is sometimes referred to as tracking or homogenous grouping. For example, students who found math challenging would be in the “low” math group, average math students would be in the “grade-level” math group, and excelling math students would make up the “advanced” group.

This type of grouping can lead to problems with students' self-concept and motivation in class. Students who found themselves in the low group would feel ashamed or stupid, and the label associated with these students is that they were difficult, incapable and/or dim students. At the same time, students in the advanced group may feel superior and boast their successes in front of other students, as well as stressed over the feeling to perform. In summary, this type of grouping typically leads to a combination of feelings including resentment, stress, inferiority, and failure; feelings that do not enhance learning.

It's not that teachers can never group students by ability. Used once in a while, this method does allow students to work at a comfortable level. However, teachers often find that heterogeneous grouping (grouping by mixed abilities) allows all students to feel success without the negative effects of homogenous groups. In mixed groups, students can learn from more advanced students, while advanced students can still be provided with opportunities to excel in an activity. Cooperative learning is an excellent setting for heterogeneous groups as students work together to solve problems or complete activities while benefiting from all learning abilities. In this setting, all students feel they are successful in their learning, and feelings of confidence, friendship, and achievement are experienced.

Skill 2.3 Distinguishes how peer interactions may promote or hinder a student's success in school, and identifies strategies for dealing with peer-related issues in given classroom contexts

Helping students to develop healthy self-images and self-worth are integral to the learning and development experiences. Learning for students who are experiencing negative self-image and peer isolation is not necessarily the top priority, when students are feeling bullied or negated in the school community. When a student is attending school from a homeless shelter or is lost in the middle of a parent's divorce or feeling a need to conform to fit into a certain student group, the student is being compromised and may be unable to effectively navigate the educational process or engage in the required academic expectations towards graduation or promotion to the next grade level or subject core level.

Most schools will offer health classes that address teen issues around sexuality, self-image, peer pressure, nutrition, wellness, gang activity, drug engagement and a variety of other relevant teen experiences. Students are required to take a health class as a core class requirement and graduation requirement, so the incentive from the District and school's standpoint is that students are exposed to issues that directly affect them. The fact that one health class is not enough to effectively appreciate the multiplicity of issues that could create a psychological or physiological trauma for a teenager is lost in today's era of school budgets and financial issues that provide the minimum educational experience for students, but loses the student in the process.

Some schools have contracted with outside agencies to develop collaborative partnerships to bring in after school tutorial classes; gender and cultural specific groupings where students can deal authentically with integration of cultural and ethnic experiences and lifestyles. Drug intervention programs and speakers on gang issues have created dynamic opportunities for school communities to bring the “undiscussable” issues to the forefront and alleviate fears that are rampant in schools that are afraid to say “No to Drugs and Gangs.” Both students and teachers must be taught about the world of teenagers and understand the social, psychological and learning implications that underscore the process of academic acquisition for societies most vulnerable citizens.

Skill 2.4 Demonstrates knowledge of how community factors (e.g., cultural and socioeconomic diversity) may affect student learning, and identifies strategies for using the community as a resource to promote learning

Oftentimes, students absorb the culture and social environment around them without deciphering contextual meaning of the experiences. When provided with a diversity of cultural contexts, students are able to adapt and incorporate multiple meanings from cultural cues vastly different from their own socioeconomic backgrounds. Socio-cultural factors provide a definitive impact on a students’ psychological, emotional, affective, and physiological development, along with a students’ academic learning and future opportunities.

The educational experience for most students is a complicated and complex experience with a diversity of interlocking meanings and inferences. If one aspect of the complexity is altered, it affects other aspects, which may impact how a student or teacher views an instructional or learning experience. With the current demographic profile of today’s school communities, the complexity of understanding, interpreting, synthesizing the nuances from the diversity of cultural lineages can provide many communication and learning blockages that could impede the acquisition of learning for students.

Teachers must create personalized learning communities where every student is a valued member and contributor of the classroom experiences. In classrooms where socio-cultural attributes of the student population are incorporated into the fabric of the learning process, dynamic interrelationships are created that enhance the learning experience and the personalization of learning. When students are provided with numerous academic and social opportunities to share cultural incorporations into the learning, everyone in the classroom benefits from bonding through shared experiences and having an expanded viewpoint of a world experience and culture that vastly differs from their own.