End of Module 4 Reflection

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This academic year has been my first year as a homeroom teacher, spending large numbers of hours each day with a group of students. As a results, I have had the opportunity to get to know them on a deep level. Trying new things, I have constantly been learning and reflecting.

This has been especially the case in this second semester since the winter vacation as I have been more comfortable in the environment myself. This has coincided with being in the program and most recently, this module.

My study, research and assignments have worked alongside my actual day to day practice these months to help with constant thinking about how to do the best for my students.

One of the biggest lessons I have learnt this school year, and it has been supported by discussing expectations, behavior management plans, and the inclusive classroom in this module, as well as differentiation in previous modules is that you really can't have the same expectations for all students.

All students – all people – are different. We think this is something we know, but as we start teaching and are trying to manage a whole class, even if we

truly are a people person, it can be easy to forget in the classroom setting. In my earlier days as a teacher, more self-conscious of what I was doing and the "control" I had, I was so worried that if I didn't have every student identically following my instructions and doing what I wanted it would mean I wasn't able to teach well or doing the best for my students.

Of course, you do want and need students to quickly follow your instructions in many situations. It is for them more than anything else as it allows things to happen more quickly and for them to get the maximum benefit from the class.

The point is however that with many groups of students, it will be difficult for all students to immediately follow instructions or engage in tasks in the same way. Trying to make this the case simply by continually drilling routines or being firm and strict, while it will be necessary and effective in some situations, won't always be the best way. In fact, by listening to a student and their motivations and not immediately "forcing" them to participate if there is an activity they really don't want to participate in, is paying closer attention to their feelings and can ultimately be a better approach to ultimately doing the best for them.

You should of course, never ignore a student in such a situation. Sometimes they do need to be pushed and encouraged. Sometimes however it is better to work with them to find different ways for them to participate, or

different supports they might need to help them to participate. If the activity being completed isn't essential for their learning and development, it can be more conducive to creating a feeling of belonging to allow them to take a break. Working with younger students in a kindergarten, I constantly try to find this balance.

Indeed just over the last two months as I have studied for this module and reflected on my practice, I have become more sensitive to the situations of some of my students. There are a group of three girls, who really don't like our morning dancing that we do with the whole kindergarten as part of the daily routine. I have encouraged them, but then when it is still difficult, worked with them to find new ways of getting involved, for example, dancing together and helping each other, or even doing there own dance if they would prefer to express themselves freely. This has supported them, and I have also been accommodating when they have wanted to take a break from it. I have seen them become more comfortable and will often be happier to participate. In the discussions, one of the girls has also been happy to open up and say that she really doesn't like this type of music. I have found out that she likes classical music, for example Mozart, and this has created the possibility for the new type of Music we can introduce all students to.

Similarly, a small number of students really do find it difficult to sit on the mat for a longer period if we are doing so to have discussions. Some do

need to let off energy and others do find the concentration and listening difficult still. Allowing them to have a break and build up more slowly the length of time they are able to engage has created far fewer tensions within the class.

Students do have different temperaments and especially being in a kindergarten, students are at quite varied levels of emotional and social development. To allow personalized learning, expecting them all to engage in all activities the same way is unrealistic and even counterproductive. I have seen it to be more effective to make accommodations so that students are able to develop different skills at their own rate, while not actually getting out of developing the skills altogether.

I think – or at least it has been the case for me – that as a teacher, once you manage to escape the self-consciousness of what it looks like in your class in terms of how "model" student behavior is and how well and routinely all students engage with every activity, your life becomes much easier. You can focus solely on the students and what is best for them based on their interests, social and emotional development, and personal interests. Truly strong classroom management is about accommodating all students needs and development on a personal level, supporting everyone.

I have had a challenging class this year, with a big range of student interests, temperaments, and level of development. This has, however, helped me grow so much as a teacher.

Of course, it would be great if all students always show model behavior and show equal strong engagement in every activity. However, in many cases this will not be realistic or take time, scaffolds, supports and accommodations to get to, for a truly inclusive classroom.

All this said, there are of course expectations and firmer rules that all students need to follow. Of course, especially with very serious rules, you shouldn't be lenient. However, even with these, especially at first, you do need to understand that students may need more support.

On the same note as everything above, for transitions and routines, students will need different levels of support and accommodations. This is a big understanding I have come through from studying this module and I have become to put it in practice, for example, giving students more notice of transitions and clearer explanations where necessary, as well as allowing students to make their own posters to remind them of routines. These have allowed students to engage with routines far more smoothly.

Moving away from the students specifically now and as a final point, it was great in this module learning about different technologies and methods of communication. Different types of technology are one thing I have not yet introduced that much into my classroom and are another great enhancement I would like to add in the next school year.

Finally, looking at behavior management plans in this final Unit and reflecting on the one I have had with a student earlier this year, I have seen just how beneficial they can be in terms of getting to know the student better and having a clear and adaptable direction. Similar types of plan could also be great for supporting students with a range of different needs, not simply challenging behavior!