

## Students

I became an educator to teach students and to inspire them to learn and grow. To do this effectively, educators must understand students as individuals — including their strengths, interests, and how they learn best. We need to focus on the whole child, not just teaching them academics. It is also important to view behavior as communication rather than a child trying to be challenging. It is our job to figure out what need they are trying to express and determine ways to meet that need without impacting their learning and the learning of others. Teachers must build strong relationships with students to develop trust and have them feel comfortable to their learning and growth.

The first artifact I chose for this element of practice was an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for one of my students that I wrote for EDSP 5730: Diagnostic Assessment. The class helped me grow and enhance my IEP writing by helping me learn about each aspect of an IEP. My professor also provided helpful feedback throughout the process. While I wrote the IEP, I worked hard to focus on my student's strengths, and created goals that align with areas of need. I focused on my student across all components of the IEP. It is written with consideration about my student's needs, how I can best support him, and what I need to be able to provide good instruction for him. The class taught me how to create appropriate accommodations for a child. For example, this child has an accommodation that allows him to use a first/then picture board, which helps him with transitions and understanding what is next in his schedule. The goals I wrote for my student were based on data and present levels of performance.

The class helped me understand the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Performance (PLAAFP) section better so that it truly reflected my student's current levels. Harmon et al. (2020) explained, "A well-crafted PLAAFP statement should summarize all aspects of a student's present levels of performance in order to identify the strengths and needs of the student as well as the student's baseline level of functioning or progress" (para. 4). This helped my IEPs become stronger, more suitable for the specific student, and clearer for families to understand their child's strengths and needs.

The second artifact is a paper I wrote for EDTE 5600: Advanced Study of Children and Adolescents called Motivation and Affect. For this assignment, I interviewed the reading specialist at my school to determine what motivates her students. We discussed intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, interest-based learning, praise, and more. It was a very inspiring interview because it gave me new ideas to try with my own students, so I can help them be more successful.

Using intrinsic motivation, interest-based learning, and the use of praise are relevant across all areas of learning, from reading and math to developing self-help skills. In the interview, we discussed that our end goal is to intrinsically motivate students. Educators want students to make kind choices because they want to be kind, not because they want a reward for doing so. We also want them to follow directions so that they can help keep everyone safe and be able to learn, not to get a reward. Moreno (2010) states that students with higher motivation to learn are more likely to learn and achieve than those with lower motivation (p. 361-362). If students are only motivated by physical rewards, their motivation is not going to continue since there can't possibly be a physical reward for everything they do. We also discussed interest-based learning. When students are interested in what they are learning, they are more likely to try. As a preschool teacher, I try to create fun, engaging learning activities for my students. I also try to give students specific feedback based on their effort, so they will work hard, apply themselves, and be persistent. Moreno (2010) stated, "Praise should be genuine, not overused, and accessible to all students" (p. 365).

The third artifact is a PowerPoint presentation created for EDSP 5710: Functional Behavior Assessment. The PowerPoint is based on what I learned from the book, *What Happened to You?* (Perry & Winfrey, 2021). I discuss trauma and frequent practices versus appropriate practices for working with children who have experienced trauma. Many children have experienced trauma, so educators need to understand the impact that it has on their brains and determine the best

ways to support them. I work in a rural school district where many of the families are living in poverty, and many children have experienced some type of trauma. To build relationships with my students, I need to recognize their histories, identify potential triggers, and determine how to best support them. Some children love hugs, but others might not want to be touched at all. As educators, we need to respect their autonomy and understand that they come from different backgrounds and experiences.

The fourth artifact is a PowerPoint presentation I created for EDSP 5740: Cultivating a Responsive Classroom about considerations to make before implementing a behavior support plan. The presentation explains things to consider and understand about a child before deciding if they need a behavior support plan or if their behavior is appropriate based on their culture, family, or other factors. In this class, I was reminded of the importance of focusing on the whole child and truly getting to know them. Children come from all different cultures, families, and backgrounds. Before making assumptions that a child is demonstrating challenging behaviors on purpose, we need to understand the child and where they are coming from. There are different cultural and family expectations across families, which may not always match up with the school's expectations. This is why it's very important to get to know families when their child enters the classroom, and to build a strong relationship to establish open communication throughout the school year.

The four artifacts I chose for this element of practice show my growth during the master's program, developing into an educator who understands my students, their ideas, and how they learn. I have learned to focus on the whole child, including the strengths to build on and weaknesses that need extra support. I use appropriate praise to encourage intrinsic learners and create engaging activities that inspire children to learn. I get to know my students and their families, and I take a trauma-informed approach so I can understand their background and support them. When a child is demonstrating challenging behaviors, I do my best to determine what they are trying to communicate and how I can help them. This program

has changed my way of thinking about children and has inspired me to be a more well-rounded educator.

## References

- Harmon, S., Street, M., Bateman, D., & Yell, M. L. (2020). Developing present levels of academic achievement and functional performance statements for IEPs. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 52(5), 320–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920914260>
- Moreno, R. (2010). Educational psychology (pp. 328-402). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Perry, B. D., & Winfrey, O. (2021). *What happened to you? Conversations on trauma, resilience, and healing*. Flatiron.