

Diversity at Bismarck High School

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Diversity Practicum

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Diversity Practicum Observations

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Placement: Bismarck High School with Tara Brenden

General Overview

Demographics:

- Grade(s): 9-12
- Gender: Overall, more male students between all the math classes (67 boys, 48 girls)
- Socioeconomic Backgrounds: Broad range from low to high
 - Prominent differences from class to class
 - Algebra 1-ranges low to high
 - Consumer Math: primarily low
 - Calculus BC/AB: primarily middle to high
- Ethnicity/Race: Caucasian, African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American
 - Students from Congo and Cameroon
- Cognitive or Physical Limitations:
 - Difficulties with reading, writing, math, processing, focus, comprehension, literacy
 - Social/Emotional Disturbance
 - Type 1 diabetes
 - Orthopedic
 - English Language Learner

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Within the eight periods of the school day, Mrs. Brenden teaches four different math classes: Algebra 1, Consumer Math (2 sections), Calculus BC, and Calculus AB. In all of the classes, the environment was warm and welcoming. This environment was created and enforced by Mrs. Brenden as she checked in with each student at the beginning of class. She knew what was going on with the students outside of her classroom and had developed genuine relationships with most, if not all, of her students. This type of environment enabled the students to feel secure, seen, and cared for in her classroom which in turn increased student motivation. The students were willing to put in the work when they were in this classroom.

It was very obvious how much Mrs. Brenden cared for her students. She greeted the students by name, would ask about a sporting event or some other activity her students were part of, and would even provide food for students who were hungry. She always had food available for students, food she paid for herself. The students knew they just needed to ask, and she would be more than happy to give them something to eat. The students were cared for.

Regarding instructional adaptations, various strategies were used in this Mrs. Brenden's classes. In every class section, skeleton notes were provided for students. This allows guidance and ease while taking notes and requires less work for students, especially those who struggle to keep up when copying notes. Mrs. Brenden also used various in-class activities, specifically in the Algebra 1 class of freshmen. Use of stations, scavenger hunts, mazes, worksheets, online puzzles, and projects kept the students intrigued because they were not being asked to do the same task repeatedly. Further, some students prefer to move around while working so a stations activity provides these students with a chance to walk around while completing the tasks. These various activities also allowed collaboration between students, and this also benefits many students who work better with others rather than alone.

Another example of an instructional adaptation used by Mrs. Brenden was seen in the Consumer Math classes. This class was centered on discussion rather than lecture. Facilitated by Mrs. Brenden, a discussion about the topic for that period took place in which students would participate and share ideas and thoughts. After talking with Mrs. Brenden about this approach, it became clear that she used this teaching style in this class specifically because the students in these sections were not necessarily high achieving. The students in these sections were primarily in this class because they could not pass higher-level math courses and lacked in motivation due to poor experiences in previous math classes. A discussion-based approach avoided the traditional lecture, notes, and worksheet class period.

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Students learned through conversing and bouncing ideas off one another with Mrs. Brenden guiding and keeping the discussion on track.

Finally, Mrs. Brenden went above and beyond for her students in multiple ways. Whether it was providing food or warm clothing, giving a student a ride somewhere, extending a due date, or giving up her prep time, Mrs. Brenden did it because it was for her students. She understood that some her students were in difficult situations at home with family, so she would provide whatever they needed because she saw all her students as more than just students. She recognized her students as a whole person with a life outside of the four walls of her classroom and understood that her classwork may not be the top priority due to life circumstances.

My biggest take-aways from observing Mrs. Brenden's math classes are the importance of relationships and the fact that all students are capable of learning. Teachers need to build positive relationships with students and really get to know each student to best help the student succeed in and out of the classroom. A good teacher-student relationship provides feelings of trust, motivation, and acceptance for students. Also, every student is capable of learning regardless of any barrier. The teacher needs to be flexible and willing to adapt to a student's needs. My biggest focus as a teacher will be on relationship building with each of my students. I have learned that a student will do what is asked of them and more when he or she trusts the teacher and knows they are cared about by someone.