**CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

**Student Characteristics: gender and race/ethnicity**

In this section of the Level II teacher work sample, you are asked to identify student characteristics related to gender, race/ethnicity, interests and student skill levels. You may address the characteristics of an individual student, the student characteristics of an entire class, the characteristics of a group of students, or some combination of individual, group, or whole class characteristics.

You must also discuss the potential implications these characteristics have for instruction for an individual, group, or an entire class. With experience and a consistent application of effort, you will become increasingly skilled at matching student characteristics to teaching strategies. For new teachers, this may be the most challenging part of the Contextual Factors. The purpose of this help page is to provide some suggestions for linking student characteristics like gender and ethnicity to some implications for instruction. These suggestions are not intended to be exhaustive or to cover every possible situation. They are intended only to provide a brief guide to stimulate your thinking. It is important to be flexible and responsive to individual situations in the classroom.

Student characteristics like gender, race, and ethnicity usually do not require special diagnostic tools be identified. Similarly, the recommended strategies for addressing these characteristics are fairly broad, often involve dispositions, and usually work best if consistently applied over long periods of time. Student characteristics that address special needs, may take longer to identify and may require some diagnostics tools applied in specific settings. Teaching strategies associated with these student characteristics are often more specific to the specific characteristic exhibited by the learner.

Below are some recommended, research-based strategies for addressing some of the student characteristics you may be observing in your classrooms. Included are teaching strategies for eliminating gender bias, improving minority achievement, teaching students from low socio economic backgrounds, teaching students for whom English is a second language, and adapting instruction for AD/HD students.

**I. Recommended strategies for eliminating gender bias.**


1. **Check to see if textbooks and other materials you are using present an honest view of the options open to both males and females.**

   Examples:
   1. Are both males and females portrayed in traditional and nontraditional roles at work, at leisure, and at home?
   2. Discuss your analyses with students, and ask them to help you find sex role biases in other materials—magazine advertising, TV programs, news reporting.
2. Watch for any unintended biases in your classroom practices.
   Examples:
   1. Do you group students by sex for certain activities?
   2. Do you call on one sex or the other for certain answers—boys for math and girls for poetry, for example?
   3. Monitor your metaphors. Ask students to “tackle the problem” and also “to cook up the solution.”

3. Use gender free language as much as possible:
   Examples:
   1. Do you speak of “law enforcement officer” and “mail carrier” instead of policeman” and “mailman.”
   2. Do you name a committee “head” instead of a “chairman.”

4. Provide role models.
   Examples:
   1. Assign articles in professional journals written by female research scientists or mathematicians.
   2. Have recent female graduates who are majoring in science, math, engineering, or other technical fields come to class to talk about college.
   3. Create electronic mentoring programs for both male and female students to connect them with adults working in areas of interest to the students.

5. Make sure all students have a chance to do complex, technical work.
   Examples:
   1. Experiment with same-sex lab groups so girls do not always end up as the secretaries, boys as the technicians.
   2. Rotate jobs in groups or randomly assign responsibilities.

II. Recommended Teaching Strategies for Minority Students

Care for each child.
Get to know them both in and out of school.
Form relationships that permit them to understand the beliefs and values students bring from home.
Allow them to be who they are – to feel good about their heritage.
Accept and accommodate their differences.
Take into account their cultural and language differences when planning lessons.
Boost their self-esteem.
Increase expectations of what they may become.
Expect they can and will learn.
Give them successful learning experiences.
Explain the importance of accomplishing the task at hand.
Use of a variety of instructional alternatives.
Use instructional alternatives that work well.
Determine how they learn best, and teach accordingly.
Keep them on task.
Accompany hard work with praise.
Check for understanding.
Openly discuss students’ academic successes.
Provide them with books they can keep.
Get them to become increasingly independent as learners.
Help them understand the school behaviors and rules they need to exhibit and follow.
Involve parents and care givers as well as older siblings.
Provide after school academic help.
Keep improving their teaching skills.

III. Recommended Teaching Strategies for students with low socioeconomic status (SES)

Hold high expectations that they can and will learn.
Respect each student’s background, culture, and language style.
Help them understand what they are learning.
Teach thinking and problem-solving skills.
Plan interesting and engaging learning experiences.
Set and maintain high expectations for behavior.
Maximize heterogeneous or mixed academic grouping.
Provide individual help.

IV. Recommended Teaching Strategies for whom English is a Second language

A. Things to keep in mind about second language learners
Younger children usually acquire new languages more easily.
Children whose parents and who themselves are more fluent in their native language learn more easily.
Children learn interpersonal language much quicker and more easily than academic or school language.
Children whose native language is close to English in sound and written symbols learn more easily.
Cultural verbal and nonverbal differences can be misleading. (Example: In Western cultures when a child smiles knowingly at a teacher it often indicates understanding. In some non-Western cultures the same act may indicate confusion or frustration.)

B. Recommended Strategies
Get to know your LEP students.
Avoid forcing them to speak if embarrassment may result.
Use visual aids. Pictures often clarify meaning.
Engage them in learning activities that require them to do rather than just listen.
Give them plenty of time to prepare responses in English.
When they do not understand, reply “You don’t understand, Okay…” rather than correcting them.
Give them outlines or notes that they can follow when a presentation is given.
Teach reading skills – skimming, outlining, making predictions from headings, creating vocabulary lists, writing responses, summarizing.

V. More Ideas for Promoting Learning and Language Acquisition

1. Effective teaching for students in bilingual and ESL classrooms combines many strategies – direct instruction, mediation, coaching, feedback, modeling, encouragement, challenge, and authentic activities.

2. Structures, frameworks, scaffolds, and strategies
   • provide support to students by “thinking aloud” building on and clarifying input of students
   • use visual organizers, story maps, or other aids to help students organize and relate information

3. Relevant background knowledge and key vocabulary concepts
   • provide adequate background knowledge to students and informally assess whether students have background knowledge
   • focus on key vocabulary words and use consistent language
   • incorporate students’ primary language meaningfully

4. Mediation/feedback
   • give feedback that focuses on meaning, not grammar, syntax, or pronunciation
   • give frequent and comprehensible feedback
   • provide students with prompts or strategies
   • ask questions that press students to clarify or expand on initial statements
   • provide activities and tasks that students can complete
   • indicate to students when they are successful
   • assign activities that are reasonable, avoiding undue frustration
   • allow use of native language responses (when context is appropriate)
   • be sensitive to common problems in second language acquisition
5. Involvement
   • ensure active involvement of all students, including low-performing students
   • foster extended discourse

6. Challenge
   • implicit (cognitive challenge, use of higher-order questions)
   • explicit (high but reasonable expectations)

7. Respect for – and responsiveness to – cultural and personal diversity
   • show respect for students as individuals, respond to things students say, show respect for culture and family, and possess knowledge of cultural diversity
   • incorporate students’ experiences into writing and language arts activities
   • link content to students’ lives and experiences to enhance understanding
   • view diversity as an asset, reject cultural deficit notions

VI. Recommended Teaching Strategies for Students with AD / HD

Learn more about AD/HD
Create an educational program that fits the child’s individual needs. Figure out what specific things are hard for the learner. For example, one student with AD/HD may have trouble starting a task, while another may have trouble ending one task and starting the next. Each student needs different help.
Help the child manage his or her behavior. Post rules, schedules, and assignments. Clear rules and routines will help a student with AD/HD. Have set times for specific tasks. Call attention to changes in the schedule.
Show the student how to use an assignment book and a daily schedule. Also teach study skills and learning strategies, and reinforce these regularly.
Help the student channel his or her physical activity (e.g., let the student do some work standing up or at the board). Provide regularly scheduled breaks.
Let the learner take tests in a quiet area so as not to be distracted.
Make sure directions are given step by step, and that the student is following the directions. Give directions both verbally and in writing. Many students with AD/HD also benefit from doing the steps as separate tasks.
Let the student do work on a computer.
Work together with the student’s parents to create and implement an educational plan tailored to meet the student’s needs. Regularly share information about how the student is doing at home and at school.
Have high expectations for the student, but be willing to try new ways of doing things. Be patient. Maximize the student’s chances for success.
