

Contextual factors of the classroom



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This paper discusses the contextual factors within the school community and how they can affect the learning and teaching process. The paper looks at different factors such as community, school district, classroom, and student characteristics. Within these factors an explanation is given for how each one can affect student learning and achievement. Also, implications are discussed and strategies are given for how teachers can incorporate contextual factors and still reach student achievement.

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Contextual Factors of the Classroom, School, and Community and How They Affect the Teaching and Learning Process

Many people think that there aren't many contextual factors within the teaching profession. They think that the teacher teaches the lesson, the students listen quietly, and then they complete their assignments. While that may be a "dream" classroom, is it far from reality. There are many implications that go along with the profession. The surrounding community, as well as, the school and school districts have a lot of contributing factors that affect the teaching and learning process. Classroom dynamics and student characteristics are also important factors when it comes to teacher planning and student learning. Teachers need to take all of these factors into account to ensure that all the needs of our students are met.

Community Factors

The community plays a big part in the learning process and school achievement. Some communities tend to become a very high transient area. Many people move around depending on where jobs are located, which leads to students coming and going throughout the academic school year. This instability causes a disruption in teaching. Achievement gaps are created because student instruction is not consistent, which leads to poor motivation within student learning.

Also, some states may have a lot of English Language Learners (ELL) depending on where they are located geographically. States that are close to the outside borders may notice an increase in ELL students, which too, may cause a challenge when providing instruction. Teachers will have to adapt their instruction to provide strategies for ELL students and make sure that they enrich their vocabulary knowledge.

Different economical statuses may also be a contributing factor within the teaching and learning process. Schools that are located in low socio-economic areas may not get the support or resources from the outside community. Parents are not able to provide supplies for their children or the classroom, which may hinder instructional opportunities for students. Whereas, schools that are located in higher economic areas have a lot of community support and local donations to help provide students with adequate resources they need for learning.

District Factors

School Districts have an immense influence when it comes to the learning and teaching process. They are the ones that pave the way for academic

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success. Lately, many districts have been going through a budget shortfall. They are being forced to lay off teachers and fill the positions with long term substitutes. Many long term substitutes do not have the same educational background and training that licensed teachers have, which may result in academic failure with our students.

Districts are also being forced to cut many programs and resources. The most frequent programs to be cut are extracurricular activities. Many students gain motivation from these extracurricular activities

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I could not agree more.. Students are required to hold a certain grade point average which forces students to try harder in school and promote academic achievement. In David Reeves' (2008) article, a study was conducted to measure the relevance between extracurricular activities and student achievement. Woodstock High School, in Woodstock Ill., found that students who

took part in three or four extracurricular activities during the year had dramatically better grades than those who participated in no extra-curricular activities

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This is a great example of how to use a reference to support the point you are trying to make..

Classroom Factors

The classroom is the most important factor when it comes to student learning and teacher instruction. It is a place where students should feel safe

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and learning should be promoted, therefore it should be clean and in superior condition. All student desks and chairs should be in good condition. If classroom furniture is uncomfortable, students may lose their lack of focus. Students should also be facing the direction where instruction is being taught, if they have to turn around to see, their focus will be lost. The materials in the classroom should be organized and available for easy access. This will allow little time to be taken away from instruction.

Technology resources are another contributing factor for student learning and the teaching process. Resources such as computers, SMART boards, and Elmos, provide a more hands on learning experience for students. These resources will allow teachers to prepare our students for the technology savvy professional community.

Another factor within the classroom is a strong sense of rules and routines. Students need to know and abide by classroom routines and rules. In the classroom, students often spend a lot of time waiting for a new activity to begin. This can lead to a lot of wasted instructional time. It is important for teachers to have effective routines in place so that the maximum amount of instructional time can be utilized. Proper routines and rules also lead to minimal disruptions and behavior problems, therefore promoting the learning process.

Cooperative learning is another important factor for the learning process. Students are able to work together and build a classroom community. During the grouping students are typically forced to use problem solving strategies to come up with solutions and enhance critical thinking skills. Cooperative

groups are also typically heterogeneous so that varied levels are incorporated into each group; everyone has something different to bring to the group.

Student Characteristics

Students often come into our classroom with a whole lot of “ baggage.”

There are many factors that students have to deal with which can affect their learning process. Many classrooms today are multicultural. It is important that teachers understand the cultural differences within their classroom, and get to know their students. Students may come from a background where education is not well respected and higher education is not an option. This may have an effect on those individual students’s achievement. Teachers will need to modify and engage learning to help motivate these students.

In today’s classroom’s, many students have special needs. Teachers need to realize that not all students are on the same level, and that instruction should be differentiated to meet the needs of each student. Most schools have adopted the inclusive model where children with special needs spend at least half of the day in a general education classroom with special assistants. Inclusive classrooms not only benefit students with special needs, but the general education students as well. Teachers are provided an assistant to help during instruction which will allow more attention to all students within the classroom. Special needs students are also introduced to more grade level content, helping them reach IEP goals. In turn, this will be beneficial towards the learning process for all students.

Students also have different learning modalities. Some students may be an auditory learner, they need to hear directions or complete oral assignments. Other students may be a visual learner; visual images are a big part of their instruction preference. Students that need to create things and move around may be kinesthetic learners. In a typical classroom, there will be a wide variety of these modalities. Teachers should provide an assortment of instructional techniques to meet the learning needs of all students.

Not all students come into your classroom with the same knowledge or skills. Many teachers have to adapt their instruction to re-teach or build background on the upcoming content. Depending on the surrounding community, students may not have the assumed social experiences. Teachers often need to spend extra time introducing students to the content, building background, and bringing in regalia to help students connect with the topic being presented. Also, students coming from the previous year may have not learned important concepts used in the next grade level. Many teachers have to spend the beginning of the school year teaching concepts that should have been mastered in the previous year. With the lack of skills or prior learning it can take twice as long to achieve the learning goals.

Instructional Implications

When planning instruction, teachers should keep many implications in mind. Teachers should become conscientious of where their student comes from. They need to remember that not all students come from the same culture and socio-economic background. Some students require more patience and understanding, which they may not receive at home. Not all students have

the same support system at home. Many parents may work, or there may be only one parent who works two jobs. We, as teachers, need to be more understanding to our students' emotional needs. These students may need extra instructional time to help achieve learning goals.

Student learning styles is another implication that teachers need to keep in mind when planning instruction. All students learn in different ways. To help with achievement, teachers should offer various activities from each modality. In my classroom I give students an assignment menu. Each menu consists of different assignments assessing the same standard. The assignments are geared to all the different learning modalities, allowing students to choose which activities they want to do. Giving students a menu of assignment choices will not only increase student achievement, but will also enhance student motivation and engagement.

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Great strategy.

When planning instruction, teachers need to take all of these contextual factors into account. As a teacher, we have to come to the realization that each student is different. Whether it's the community, school district, classroom, or the student characteristics, each student comes with a " bag" of who they are. We need to embrace their " bag" and help them achieve academically, socially, and emotionally.