Diversity Practicum Capstone Paper

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**Introduction**

I have learned a lot from working with kids in a diverse setting. I think that it really gives me a good head start for working in a classroom, because every class will be extremely diverse, whether it is age, sex, socioeconomic status, or in my case with coaching, athletic ability. In my experience as a junior golf instructor this past summer, we had to deal with a very diverse group of students and I think that we did a very good job at accommodating all of the unique characteristics that the students had. The major points that I picked up in this experience is, all kids want to learn, everybody is different in how they learn, and not all of the students have the same opportunities at home.

**Demographics**

This was a very diverse group of kids that I worked with over the summer. I had kids from as young as 4 years old to as old as 16 so it was extremely different working with the vast age differences especially when it comes to athletics. Another difference that we had to face was having both sexes enrolled in the groups, this is far more difficult to accommodate for in athletics than it is in the classroom in my opinion because they are forced to do things with their bodies, and their bodies are naturally different so little things like their swing paths need to be tweaked to accommodate for that. A third difference came in the socioeconomic status of the children, some of them came in with new clubs and all of the gear needed, and others had nothing at all so we needed to have certain things available for these students to use. These differences made it very important that we as instructors would change what we did for each individual athlete because their skillsets and abilities were so different from child to child.

**Environmental Adaptations**

The most important adaptation that we needed to make for the diverse students was breaking them up into groups so that they were working with others with a similar skill level. We did this by breaking the entire program up into three different sections. The first section was the red group, which was designed for beginning students, usually between the ages of 4 and 6. The next group was the white group and they had a much larger demographic and included ages of students anywhere from 7-16 this past summer, and is open for kids as old as 18. This group included kids who understood the basics of the game but were still trying to fine-tune their skills. The next group was open to any age and it was designed for advanced students who wanted some more one on one time with the instructors. Breaking the kids up by skill level rather than age was important so that we as coaches could focus on the issues that the students were having and not leaving anybody behind. We would often times put the instructors who had more experience with the groups of students who had been struggling more than others. This helped those kids catch up to the rest of the group.

Other than skill, we also tried to separate the students by sex. This is different than an accommodation that would generally be used in a classroom, but it was very important for us as instructors do this. Golf is a mental game, and often times when we put the girls in a group of boys, they would be nervous to do anything physical around them. Our goal was to make them feel as comfortable as possibly mentally before we even thought about swinging a club, because if your head is not right, golfing is impossible. We adjusted and tried to put the girls together in one group and send the female instructors with that group.

A third accommodation that we had to make with the environment was making changes for the students who did not have everything needed to play. We understood beforehand that not all of the kids would be able to afford the things to play. This included balls, tees, glove, and even clubs. What we did, was use some of our extra money and fill a trailer full of extra clubs and everything else the kids would need to play so that everybody could be involved.

**Instructional Adaptations**

This was perhaps the largest area in which we focused on. I believe that in athletics, and in the classroom, a lot of the instructional adaptations need to be done on the fly. To account for this, we tried to set one coach up with only about 2-4 students. This way we could really pinpoint where each kid was struggling with his or her swing. Golf is a very precise sport so when you have a lot of kids swinging it is very hard for us to help them on an individual level. So breaking them up into smaller groups helped us set up lessons and strategies fit for each child. Often times we would have a coach work individually with one of the students so that they could really focus on what was happening.

In just about every session there would be a kid who one of us would take under our wing for the rest of the session. As a summer activity leader, we were not in the right place to get involved in the home loves of the kids, but we could help them while they were there. Dr. Werner said something that really struck me in regards to working with kids that come from a tough home life. She said, “Positioning a child to flourish early in life involves skills such as focusing attention, planning, monitoring, delaying gratification, problem-solving, working in teams and self-regulating.” I really liked how she worded this and I think that the game of golf teaches a lot of these things (Werner). Working with kids in these types of programs gives me the experience that I need and helps me understand them, so that I can be a positive role model in their lives.

I also thought that the reading that was posted from Paul Chaat Smith’s book, Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong, was very interesting. I think that it teaches us a valuable lesson about something that I think all of us do to some degree, stereotyping. It is very easy to look at somebody and judge them on what they look like, but most of the time you are going to be wrong. I think that in working with kids, this is extremely important to avoid. This does not just include Native Americans. Every person can be judged somehow on what they look like, but we as educators need to look past that and truly get to know the child so we can help them to the best of our ability. It is very hard to do but so important that we do it, inside and outside of the classroom. Adjustments need to be made by us so that each and every student feels comfortable with their surroundings.

**Extra Help**

Golf is hard, very hard in fact, and it cannot be learned in the week that we get to spend with the kids. The rest of their golf career will be done either on their own or with the help of their parents or someone else. What we try to do is build a solid foundation so that they learn to love the game of golf and learn and develop their skills on their own. At the end of each session we always give the kids a packet with ideas for going out and playing. There are options for scheduling private lessons with some of the instructors in there, and also the lists of the courses in which they can play free all summer long. We also encourage the parents to get out there and play with their kids, and help them practice. There are opportunities everywhere to go out and practice including various putting greens and holes in which they can go for free and practice on our own. Our job is to get them to like the game enough to take advantage of these opportunities and further their game.

**Things that I will take into my future classroom**

I learned so much over the course of this last summer, and a lot of those lessons will stick with me forever. The first was that forming a relationship with the students makes everything more enjoyable. If you are about to laugh and enjoy yourself while you are teaching the students will feed off of your energy and it makes for a very positive learning environment. This also helps with the behavior of the kids, if they respect you; they are far more likely to listen to what you have to say. The second thing that I will take with me is that each and every student is different, and because of that they learn differently too. One strategy may work perfectly for one student and not at all for another, so it is important to know your students and understand the way that they learn. And last but certainly not least, patience. This is extremely important in the classroom. We as educators need to understand that sometimes students just wont get something, and it is our job to work with them and help them understand the things that they need to do to be successful in the future, regardless of how much time that takes.

**Summary of the Experience**

Overall this was an amazing experience and I will be doing it again this summer. I love working with kids of all ages, shapes, and abilities. I am a firm believer in that the only way to become good with kids is to actually interact with them. You need to figure out their quirks and what make them who they are, and once you do that the job is that much more fun. Working in such a diverse environment is great because I get to work with so many different kids and see each individuals learning style up close and I get to see them put that into something that I love in the game of golf.

References

Smith, P. C. (2009). Everything you know about Indians is wrong. Minneapolis (Minn.): University of Minnesota Press.

Werner, B., PhD. (n.d.). Educating Students in Poverty. 360 Review, 91-99. Retrieved April 14, 2017.