Philosophy of Early and Special Education
Honors Capstone

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May 7, 2016
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A. ABSTRACT

This Honors Capstone is a compilation of my personal philosophy of education, helpful resources, and reflections on my early and special education experiences. It contains such topics as my personal philosophy of education, lesson plan strategies to keep in mind, and analysis of my own teaching experiences. It also includes classroom equipment and resource strategies, strategies for accommodating learners with disabilities, and strategies for parent/teacher collaboration. The end of the Capstone provides Appendixes for lesson plans, types of assistive technology, and examples of parent/teacher collaboration.

B. PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

As a teacher, I will go into education with particular reasons why I want to teach, thoughts on student and teacher roles, and thoughts on the purpose of education. As a prospective teacher, I also have some thoughts about where I would like to teach. All of these aspects will shape the way in which I teach and what things I place an emphasis on. Along my education career, my philosophy might change slightly as I gain experience and see what things work and what does not, and what things are realistic and those that are not. Following is my current philosophy of education.

Right now I have some thoughts about what I think would be an ideal place for me to teach, although I think this might change as I continue to be prepared for my career in early and special education. I would like to work at a child care center teaching Special Education Preschool. My preferred age range for teaching would be ages 2-5 years. I would like to work somewhere in the Lake County area (in Illinois). I definitely want the Child Care Center I work at to be National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited. I
believe that the standards and regulations expected by this certification promotes excellence in early childhood centers, and are essential for making the center high-quality. I want the Center to be multiculturally-focused, allows for parents to be involved, and one that features and promotes families’ funds of knowledge (Allen, 2007). Most importantly, I believe it is important that the Center is largely in line with my philosophy of early and special education.

Although there might be slight differences between schools regarding the purpose of schools, I believe the greatest purpose is to pass on society’s knowledge and values to the next generation. In the book Teachers, Schools, and Society – A Brief Introduction to Education (2011), it says, “By selecting what to teach – and what to omit - schools are making a clear decision as to what is valued, what is worth preserving and passing on” (Sadker, 2012). It continues on to say, “As a society transmits its culture, it also transmits a view of the world” (Sadker, 2012). So, one of the goals of a school I would work at would be to pass on those cultures and values so that the next generation has a foundation in world view that they can work with as they integrate into the society. An example of a value I would teach to my students would be to respect their friend’s individual rights (Cowhey, 2006). Emphasizing this value in the school will teach the students that this is something that is valued in our society. Another purpose of school I believe that is important would be to foster an awareness in the students for the hardships and challenges humans in this world face, and in what ways we as individuals, as a class, or as a school can make a positive change for them (Cowhey, 2006). For example, if a child in my class is diagnosed with cancer, our class comes up with ways we can bless that family – through a care package, a get well card, maybe meals, maybe even raising money by fundraising, etc. Doing these acts of kind service will teach my students that families do face times of difficulty and that we can do our part in helping them and showing that we care. My
hope would be that by doing these types of services, it would make my students be aware of the various types of difficulties that are out there in the world and that they can see that they can be active participants to help alleviate them. Additionally, I believe it should be the goals of schools to teach students academic material, prepare them for vocations, participate in social and civic services, and encourage them to develop personally. I believe these should be purposes of the school and I would want the school I teach at to embrace them.

Why do I teach? I think there is a great deep down desire in all people to want to learn and discover new material and knowledge. We see in even the youngest children their curiosity and inquisitiveness as they explore their environment and ask “why?”. My hope is that as a teacher I will be able to keep this yearning within children going - that they continue to love to gain knowledge and explore their environment. I want to pass on the contagious joy learning can have. In addition, I have a great desire to be a positive impact on my students, fully knowing the grave responsibility I have to shape my student’s minds, help prepare them to be adults, and educate this generation of students. Additionally, as I have worked with school-age children, I have developed a strong passion for working with them, and I find it very fulfilling. I find great joy in watching them as they discover their environment, interact with others, persevere in challenging situations, and reach milestones. Every time I am able to interact with children, deep down I know that this is where my strengths are and what I was made to do and be – an early and special education teachers. These are the reasons I teach.

I really like some of the aspects found within the Progressivism philosophy. I use some of it now and will continue to use it in my teaching. For example, I really like how in this philosophy, teaching is based on student curiosity and concerns. As mentioned before, I want my students to be curious (Wein, 2008), but I also want them to be free to share their concerns
and opinions. I believe that being able to share their thoughts helps them develop their critical thinking skills, helps them understand each other and their opinions, and teaches them to come to compromises. I want my classroom to be able to do this. In addition, I like how in the Progressivism philosophy teaching incorporates real-world experiences (practical learning), especially through fieldtrips. I believe students learn so much through doing things that are real life experiences. As a teacher, I will try to incorporate as may real-world experiences as I can, taking my students on fieldtrips to the library, the fire station, museums, apple orchards, the zoo, parks, etc. I think so much can be learned and explored when students, especially the young ones, are able to actually see and do the concepts being discussed. I also really like how the Progressivism philosophy promotes students being able to lead, and allowing them to have some voice in the curriculum choices (Wein, 2008). I believe that if children are able to express their interests, they will be more likely to want to learn the material presented to them, and if I as the teacher can use their interest and build the curriculum around it, much learning can be accomplished (Wein, 2008). I also really like how in the Progressivism philosophy students formulate questions and devise strategies to try to solve these questions. Again, I think this is a great opportunity for students to work on their critical thinking skills, as they come up with ways problems can be solved and use prior knowledge from previous problem-solving experiences. Additionally, I really like the emphasis on social interaction in this philosophy. I think it is key to help students be able to interact with each other from an early age, helping them build skills and strategies that they will be able to incorporate throughout life. I think the classroom is an ideal place to begin this instruction. Moreover, I really like the flexibility of the curriculum in the Progressivism philosophy and how it appeals to multiple intelligences. I believe it is very important to have flexibility in the curriculum, allowing room to be able to teach each child in a
way that specifically uses his/her multiple intelligent and learning styles. Being able to teach in this way allows more success with students learning material. I believe these are very important aspects of education, and is therefore the reason why I embrace the Progressivism philosophy.

I believe it is each student’s role to have a deep desire and love to learn the information that is presented to him/her in the classroom. It is also their role to be an active part in the classroom through exploring, experimenting, and engaging in the lessons (Wein, 2008). I believe taking an active role and keeping a positive attitude about learning makes the instruction by the teacher effective; learning is actually taking place. In addition, as my students observe how I model and go about doing things, they can use it to imitate me and therefore promote their own-initiated learning. I believe it is important that students learn to make decisions for themselves, share their ideas and preferences, and that they are involved in making and seeing change. I also believe that as students participate in the classroom, they prepare themselves for the future, particularly in learning practical skills, getting a well-rounded education, and forming critical thinking skills. I think these are some of the roles students have in my classroom.

There are also roles that I, the teacher, have in my classroom. I believe my biggest role is to be an inspiration to the students. I believe this can be conveyed through my passion for teaching, my expression of love for learning, and my being actively involved in the classroom (Feeney, S. et al, 2012). Additionally, I think it is my role that I am an effective facilitator by being a positive role-model, and appealing to multiple intelligences and learning styles in all the lessons I give. I believe it is also my role that I establish a classroom environment that is inviting, warm, and supportive for my students. I think this has a big part in setting the tone of the attitudes of my students. In addition, I think it is another role of my roles to include diverse students in my classroom, welcoming children with behavior problems, children with special
needs, children at risk for failure, and children who are second language learners into my class. Additionally, I think it is my role to take appropriate assessments to see student progress so that if students are not seeing advancements, appropriate adjustments can be made to my curriculum instruction and/or further services are given to that child. Assessments can include anecdotal notes, observation, and standardized tests. Another of my big roles as a teacher would be to establish good classroom management skills. These management skills would include clearly stating student expectations, establishing and executing consequences, arranging classrooms in a way that minimize disturbances and distractions, managing student anger and aggression, and treat students with respect, and provide students with feedback. I think it is important to have control of the students within the class, skills to deal with problem kids, and be able to provide appropriate attention to all students – all done with good balance. These are some of the roles I believe I have as a teacher in my classroom.

As I step out into the field of education, this philosophy of education will come along with me. It will remind me of why I teach, my student’s role in the classroom, my role as the teacher, what the purpose of education is, and where I want to teach. As I learn more and readjust my thinking, I will change this philosophy to reflect my thoughts – with the common goal of the continuous success of my students throughout their educational experience.

C. LESSON PLAN STRATEGY

One of the significant components of a philosophy of Education that is feasible, is when the lesson plans are carefully planned and carried out. This means that they are created with developmentally appropriate practices for the age of the students, they incorporate different modes of teaching and learning, has chronological sense, incorporates ideas that can be
differentiated to meet the needs of all learners, and meet state objectives and national standards (Feeney et al., 2014). Additionally, comprehensive lesson plans for the early and special education should be planned to allow for play (rotation around the classroom centers), time for social interaction, time for personal thought and reflection, time for snack, time for learning about personal care (e.g., going to the bathroom), and time for large motor or outside time. Other important considerations should be to have time for language and reading, time for fine motor use, time for math and manipulation, and time for creativity through art and writing.

An example of a superlative lesson plan I have created can be seen in Lesson Plan Example 1 in the Appendix. This lesson plan contains all of the components listed above, although state standards and learning objectives are not actually written within the weekly plan, but were considered when writing the plan. The lesson plan is simple and clear. It has a purpose and is based on student interest. The activities listed are developmentally appropriated. A note has to be made to his example – that technology is included in order to meet the needs of students with special needs that need extra assistance. The activities listed can done throughout the day, and help the students meet the developmental stages appropriate for their age. Lesson Plan Example 3 is certainly an exemplary model of an ideal and well developed lesson plan for the early and special education classroom.

Lesson Plan 2 and Lesson Plan 3 are also examples of excellent lesson plans, although some of the lessons planned for the week were not really comprehensive and developmentally appropriate due to a holiday and school events that were taking place that week. On the other hand, there will be days when a teacher has little to no control over certain school-wide activities that take up part of the day that will be required for you and your students to attend. This is when teacher flexibility is demonstrated to go with the flow of the larger school body.
D. TEACHING VIDEOS ANALYSIS

My teaching videos captured a week-long unit on Dr. Seuss. It focused primarily on Dr. Seuss’ early childhood, his contributions to society through his incredible children’s books, and his later life. My students had all previously learned about Dr. Seuss in Kindergarten and had all read his books prior to our unit. The activities in the unit that I taught included reading through an overview of him on a PebbleGo online article, reading the March Scholastic News Magazine containing a short biography about Dr. Seuss, and reading another more detailed biography about Dr. Seuss (combined with comprehension questions).

As I analyze the teaching videos from my student teaching, I can connect five key points found in my teaching that either align or do not align with my above described teaching philosophy. The first point is that because there is a great deep down desire in all children to want to learn and discover new material and knowledge, it is my responsibility to promote and nurture that desire. The second point is that teaching should be based on student curiosity and concerns. The third point is that the student’s role is to be an active part in the classroom through exploring, experimenting, and engaging in the lessons. Fourth, I think it is my role that I am an effective facilitator by being a positive role-model, and appealing to multiple intelligences and learning styles in all the lessons I give. Fifth, I believe it is very important to have flexibility in the curriculum, allowing room to be able to teach each child in a way that specifically uses his/her multiple intelligent and learning styles.

The first point in my philosophy is that there is a great internal desire in all children to want to learn and discover knowledge, and that I should continue to grow and nurture this desire. This desire was very evident with my students as I videotaped the lessons I taught; they really wanted to learn and discover information beyond what I was teaching. Unfortunately, this point in my
philosophy was not upheld in my videos. For example, I was not able to really address each of their questions and inquiries to find out more about Dr. Seuss beyond my lesson plan. In my teaching videos I was not able to answer their questions, but rather frequently passed over their questions in order to stay on track with the time and the teaching material I was given. I really crammed in a lot of information in a little bit of time, yet did not have much time left to explore and discuss their thoughts on what they heard presented. I do not believe that the way I addressed the teaching in this manner was beneficial to the students. Rather, it kept the students yearning for more information and getting frustrated that their questions were not being answered. At multiple points in their teaching they raised their hand because they so badly wanted to share or ask a clarifying question, but I did not “have time” to address them. This is not an appropriate teaching method. From the video, it is evident that as a teacher I do need to nurture the student’s desire to learn by taking more time in my lessons to address their questions. Also, it was evident in my teaching that it is part of student’s nature to want to ask questions and get answers. Thus, in future teaching I will take more time to promote new knowledge acquisition based on their internal desire to learn.

The second point I would highlight in my philosophy is that teaching should be based on student curiosity and concerns (a part of the Progressivism Approach). As stated before, it is a good thing that students are curious; it guides and motivates their learning, as well as my instruction. In my teaching, it was evident throughout all the videos that my students had curiosity and opinions based on the materials we were covering. Some of them I addressed, while others I let go or talked over. Upon reflection, this was not a very student-centered way of teaching – to disregard their curiosity and concerns. In other words, my teaching was more teacher-centered; I taught, they just listened. As a result, students could not keep up with me as I
was teaching, they checked out more easily, or even rebutted in order to be heard. Another result of my malpractice is that students talked more among themselves while I was teaching in order to get out what they were thinking and to share their opinions. I believe that this should be addressed differently in my future teaching. I want students to be free to share their concerns and opinions, thus I need to allow time in my lesson plans for them to do this. I believe that being able to share their thoughts helps them develop their critical thinking skills, helps them understand each other and their opinions, and teaches them to come to compromises. I want my future classroom to be like this, rather than what my student teaching classroom was like.

The third point is that the student’s role is to be an active part in the classroom through exploring, experimenting, and engaging in the lessons. In my videos and instruction, this was not really possible or evident. Students were not able to explore on their own, experiment, or engage much in the lessons I taught. They simply sat there and were expected to listen to me, and wait for me to call on them so that they could share a few seconds of thought. As a result, the students lost interest, checked out, and were fidgety. In reflection, I see that these are all signals that my instruction method was not effective, and that I needed to change it to incorporate exploring, experimenting, and engaging. Thus, in future instruction, I plan to incorporate more of a hands-on approach to learning. This could include such things as them reading part of the material, them coming up to help me navigate the online magazine pages, them holding up pictures of the subtopic in discussion, or even acting out what they heard as I read Dr. Suess’ biography. These are more hands-on ways to learn information rather than just sitting and listening for a period of 20 to 30 minutes. There is so much benefit when students are able to participate in a hands-on way – the instruction is better received and makes a greater impact on the students. In my future instruction, I will make it a point to consider making the students more active participants.
Fourth, I think it is my role that I am an effective facilitator by being a positive role-model, and appealing to multiple intelligences and learning styles in all the lessons I give. This point I did uphold moderately in my teaching videos, although I would like to incorporate it more in future teaching opportunities. As a role-modeled, I showed them what I expected of them as we made our way through the lessons. For example, in my teaching videos, when I was not presenting, I was quiet and looking at the student who was speaking. Also, I let them finish their thought before I went ahead and spoke over them. This was being a positive role-model to them, but I would like to incorporate this more frequently throughout my teaching. Additionally, when I was teaching, I tried to appeal to multiple intelligences and learning styles by incorporating times to listen, times to speak or share, times to move about, times for visuals, times for social interaction, and times for personal reflection. For example, when I called on the students, they were able to have the chance to share verbally to the whole class (language). When I had them share with each other, they were practicing the social skill. When I had them look at the visuals, they used their spatial and visual skills. When I had them reflect and keep their answer to themselves, they were practicing intrapersonal skills. These are examples of ways I was appealing to their multiple intelligences and learning styles. This point in my philosophy of education was upheld somewhat in my teaching videos, but I would like to incorporate it more frequently in my daily lessons as I feel it would be beneficial for my students. Each child learns through different learning styles, thus incorporating multiple styles within a lesson will reach more students, which as a result will ideally provide for more students being able to learn and comprehend my lessons.

Fifth, I believe it is very important to have flexibility in the curriculum, allowing room to be able to teach each child in a way that specifically uses his/her multiple intelligent and learning
Having the mind set on curriculum flexibility, enables the teacher to be less robotic and more intuitive about what is going on in the classroom. As a result, the above mentioned items are easier to deal with, and students are more open to be active learners. Flexibility of curriculum also helps me as the teacher to be able to address issues in the class and take tangents in conversations as they come. This is a good thing as it lays out a ground where students are respected more and have time to be able to be curious and observant, and ask those questions they want answers to ask. Their yearning to learn becomes quenched. These are all benefits. As I look at my teaching videos I was able to have some flexibility in the lesson plans, but not in the curriculum I taught. In my teaching, it was evident that I was trying too hard to hold to the schedule, time, and materials given to me to cover. I did not see the students performing their best as I taught, and I feel that this was a reflection of the fact that I did not have flexibility in my curriculum teaching. I and they were more like robots just doing the motions but not really paying close attention to what was said and heard, which, in my opinion, is not what teaching and learning should be. I believe in my future classrooms, I need to be more flexible in my curriculum and teaching.

Overall, as I reflect on my teaching videos, I have a number of changes that I would make in future instruction. These include that I would not use so many texts that required sitting and listening. I felt like the students needed more chances to be up and about and doing hands-on learning. For example, it would be great to have taken the *Cat in The Hat* and counted how many words were in the book. An activity like this would have eliminated some of the behavioral struggles experienced and would have reached the students with academic challenges. Also, I would have liked to spend more time with the students interacting with each other, such as in small groups rather than as a whole group. This would have assisted the students who speak
better in small groups, and benefited the students with social delays. Additionally, I would have liked to have posted the key vocabulary learned in the unit somewhere in the room so that students could refer to them when they spoke and wrote. Moreover, I would have preferred that the students read some of the texts rather than just me or the online program reading them all. I think this would have improved the active learning within the students, and in general benefited all students. I believe these changes would improve children’s learning because they would emphasize more of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, Skinner’s Language Acquisition theory, and Vygotsky’s theory for social learning. Students would each have been more reached by their individual way of learning. Students would be able to acquire and practice language more. And students would be able to interact and learn from each other better than if it was just teacher directed. Less teacher directed and more student directed instruction would increase active learning. Thus, I believe that the above changes would have improved children’s overall learning, their language/literacy, and behaviors.

This completes my analysis of my teaching videos. Overall, I would say that I gained a lot of insight as to how I have taught in the past, and how I want to teach in the future. My desire is that from this knowledge gained, I will adjust and refocus to having a philosophy of education that is the most beneficial to the students I am currently teaching. I look forward to being able to teaching my future class more in line with my teaching philosophy.

E. ANALYSIS OF TEACHING METHODS REFLECTION

As I have taught preschool and special education in different capacities, I have found the following listed experiences and participations to be helpful in providing me a well-rounded foundation for my own future classroom and teaching method. They are as follows:
**Positive Behavior Support Day.** Participated in a full day positive behavior support day. This included taking my morning and afternoon classes around the school to different stations that discussed the expected behavior in that area (eg. bus room, bus, class, hallway, bathroom, etc). I demonstrated expected behavior to the students, and also praised them verbally when they showed expected behavior. The day culminated with a school wide assembly in the afternoon. During the assembly students were reassured that they can meet the expected behaviors in each of the areas of the school throughout the schoolyear. Students then had a chance to participate in fun assembly games (a new addition to current assembly structures) to see how fun assemblies will be in the future - and what they will miss if they get written up for not following expected behaviors, thus not being invited to participate in the assembly.

**Staff Meetings.** Attended all morning (before school begins) bi-monthly staff meetings. Took notes and stayed informed about different activities happening at the school – both those that pertained to Preschool and those that did not. After the meetings, debriefed with the Preschool Team. Incorporated the information presented at the meetings into my teaching when appropriate (eg. using the positive behavior support, or encouraging the students to read for our reading challenge).

**Preschool Team Planning Meetings.** Attended and participated in all weekly preschool planning meetings. Contributed my thoughts and opinions, provided suggestions and questions, and worked on problem solving solutions. Made sure we remembered to incorporate any school activity or event into our plans while we planned for the coming weeks.

**IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) Meetings.** Attended several IEP meetings. Introduced myself and my title at the meetings. Provided reassurance to parents as needed through non-verbal and verbal communication. Backed up what other members of the team said
with my own views of how their child was doing. Debriefed with CT (Cooperating Teacher), Speech and Language Pathologist, and Special Education teachers at the end of the meeting regarding content that was discussed during the meetings, especially regarding reasonable Kindergarten placement for the student for next year (regular classroom, inclusive classroom, or a combination of regular and special education), and probable services the student will likely need to be carried over into the next academic year. Stayed informed and continue to participate in these student’s IEPs and placement/services decisions. Participated in discussions for next year placements for these Preschool students.

**Parent Teacher Communication.** Personally responded to daily parent-sent notes (reviewed by CT before it was sent out), helped proofread and provide suggestions for CT’s emails to parent inquiries and concerns, observed Special Education teacher write daily notes to the two parents who have children with significant language limitations regarding how their child’s day went, and communicated with parents when their child was picked up as necessary. Completed numerous teacher questionnaires regarding student performance in the classroom in order to help parents and Special Education professionals determine proper services and accommodations for the student. Constantly was in communication with other members of the classroom team regarding concerns seen in the students – that may need to be addressed or reassessed.

**Professional Development.** Went through an interview process with the school to see if I would be a fit for one of the positions available in the Preschool program. Also, the last fifteen minutes of the bi-monthly faculty meetings covered some personal development materials – like what using the Danielson Model in your classroom looks like.

**Units Planned.** Planned and taught most of the two week Dinosaur unit and all of the two week Bugs unit. Came up with ideas, researched ideas, proposed the ideas, prepared for the
activities, and then taught the lessons. Was part of the team to switch out the classrooms according to the new units; putting the old unit materials away, and taking out new materials for the new unit.

**DIAL 3 Screening.** Participated in a DIAL 3 screening for a prospective program participant with developmental delays. Observed all sections of the screening being performed, provided comments about what I saw, and helped give a score for the item being evaluated. Helped entertain the child between the sections of the DIAL. Afterwards, reviewed the scores with the CT and Special Education teacher, added up the scores, made additional comments pertaining to the sections in the screening, and then participated in the discussion of the child’s current development (strengths and needed areas for growth). I continue to stay informed on my class’ performance on the DIAL (as they also are now being re-evaluated using DIAL 3 or DIAL 4).

**Student Enrichment Services.** Helped set up iPads with the Touch Chat program so that the non-verbal students in our class can communicate with us. Provided suggestions, feedback, and incorporated the use of the app program into the classroom routine for the students. Also, I continue to use Teaching Strategies to document my class’ developmental progress – taking pictures of their work, writing comments, and scoring them according to their performance.

**Practice Invader Lock-Down Drill.** Led my preschool classroom through a practice invader lock-down drill. This included informing the students of the upcoming practice, closing all window shades, covering the door window, removing lock safety magnet from door, turning off lights, gathering students, and keeping students quiet during the drill (very hard to do!) until the police officer arrived. The drill ended with a visit from the local police dog!

**Kindergarten Spring Concert Rehearsal.** Attended the rehearsal with the afternoon preschool class. Watched the Kindergarteners perform while I assisted our Preschoolers to be
examples of a good listening audience; sat with students that I knew would have a hard time sitting through the whole hour long event. Directed our class through the busy halls to our classroom after the concert, and refocused their attention on the end of the day routine.

**Newsletters.** Weekly I send out communication notes to the families. I share with them what we have been doing in class, the students’ popular centers (and why), and what we will do in the coming week. Based on the unit, I will then provide the parents with ideas of activities they can do with their child to expand upon what they have learned. The ideas are usually simple, can be used multiple times, and work on specific developmental skills, thus I describe some suggestions of how the activity can be done and why it is important to do with their child (aka. how it is developmentally appropriate for preschoolers). I then follow-up with students to see if they have completed the activities I sent to their parents (so far no one has completed them). My CT and I are now looking at ways to improve the weekly newsletter and our communication with parents to be able to reach more parents. Possible changes may be implemented next week – eg. sending the communication notes and activities home in their backpacks (although most parents don’t look into their child’s backpack either). We will see how those work and maybe try something else the week after next week.

**F. CLASSROOM EQUIPMENT AND RESOURCES STRATEGY**

Throughout my education and field experience with early and special education classrooms, I have found that certain classroom equipment and resources have been helpful to my teaching. Three kinds of technology equipment and one gross-motor movement equipment stand out to me. The three assistive technologies include a smartboard, an iPad (or any other similar device) that carries an assistive language program for students with little to no language, and an FM
transmitter and receivers. These devices are each essential to the special education classroom in order to reach the students that are easily distracted or need hands on (Smartboard), students that can not communicate well on their own (iPad with Touch Chat), and students who have a hearing impairment of any degree. These three technologies I find are very helpful to have available to any teacher working in early and special education classrooms.

The motor resource equipment is a compilation of mats, balls, balance beams, bridges, slides, scooters, etc. that would go in a special gross-motor room or area of a room. These resources are important additions to the early and special education classroom because they help foster gross-motor, which is crucial for the young child. Gross-motor is essential to the proper physical and mental development of the young child. Thus, having these materials on hand are a great, and in my opinion essential, parts of the classroom. I would not do without them in my classroom.

Four resources have been helpful throughout my teaching. One of the resources is an online website called *A Teaching Technique for Teachers of Students With LD* (Understood, 2014-16). In this video Meg Randall discusses the techniques she uses in her classroom to provide instruction suitable for all of the variety of learners she has in her class – both for those with and without special needs. She discusses how she restructured her classroom to provided differentiated reading learning centers so that she could meet the special needs of her students who work better when they are mobile. Randall had her students walk to the reading learning centers, where they could practice their skills. This whole time, she could easily move along with her students with learning disabilities. Randall’s students are able to receive their special education services within the classroom along with their normal functioning peers.

The second helpful article is called *An Overview of Assistive Technology* by Understood (2012). This article, as the title indicates, provides an overview of assistive technology for
students with learning disabilities. It discusses that the purpose of assistive tools is to help an individual work around his/her disability or deficit. It lays out possible categories of assistive technology – high tech and low tech. Examples of low tech assistive technology can include highlighters, books on tape, or color coding files/drawers. Examples of high tech assistive technology include speech recognition systems, computers with print-recognition software, or talking calculators. The article also discusses what assistive technology can do, such as improve the speed and accuracy of work, reinforce effective classroom instruction, and motivate students with learning disabilities to set high goals for themselves. The article also states things that assistive technology cannot do, such as fix the learn disability, compensate for ineffective teaching, or automatically promote positive attitude toward learning. At the end of the article is a list of questions to ask to determine what assistive technology best fits the needs of the individual being evaluated. I think this article is a great resource to point parents to when they have a child with a learning disability and are considering assistive technology for him/her.

Another great resource is the Understood article entitled Classroom Strategies (2014-16). This article proposes some of the reasons why classroom strategies are used and it provides examples of strategies. The article states that as a teacher it is always your responsibility to keep in mind the needs of individual learners, especially those with learning disabilities. Such special needs include accommodations, the use of assistive technology, and additional support for the child. The article reminds teachers that you are an important part of the IEP team, providing observations and information about different kinds of specialized instruction and additional support. The article also expressed that providing these extra services to our students with learning disabilities does not mean that we have lower expectations for these students, but rather
that we are leveling the playing field so that they can have a realistic chance to succeed in
school.

The fourth resource I found helpful was *Tips and Resources for Teachers* (Center for Parent
Information and Resources, 2015). This article provides tips for teachers who are working with
students with learning disabilities. Some of the tips include finding out and emphasizing
students’ strengths and interests, giving positive feedback, breaking down tasks into smaller
steps, using testing modifications, and using assistive technology. Additional tips include
teaching students with learning disabilities organizational skills, study skills, and learning
strategies. Also, this website emphasized the importance of having positive and regular
communication with parents. At the end of the article, is a section of other website suggestions
that teachers will find helpful in working with their students with learning disabilities.

Another great resource I have used is the book *Parents and Professionals Partnering for
Children with Disabilities* (2012). This handbook provides wonderful information about the
partnership you have with parents with children with special needs. It uses the metaphor of a
dance to explain this partnership. It also breaks down the partnership into four types of dances –
listening to the hidden lyrics (tuning in to each other), the dance manual (the essential dance to
keep dancing), when the dance is complicated, and enhancing the dance (making partnership
notes) (Fialka, 2012). The book explains how these stages are inevitable, yet are important to
acknowledge and work through. As each of you begins to dance more in harmony, the dance
becomes easier and you can soon enter that last stage of making partnership notes to make the
communication easier. This book is excellent in providing tips and suggestions on partnering
with partnering with families with children with special needs.
G. ACCOMODATING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES STRATEGY

Although a lot has already been said in the above discussions regarding accommodating learners with disabilities, it is a topic that needs great thought and consideration, and really, it is going to be different with each class and each year you teach. I will use my student teaching experience to demonstrate how I accommodated learners with special needs. First of all, I attempted to make sure I both addressed and adapted my instruction so that it was in line with each child’s specific development. For example, because I know that one of my students had an academic delay, I gave her an easier question that I felt was reasonable to challenge her based on her cognitive development. Additionally, for some of the advanced students, I asked them a question that required deeper thinking and an inference. I also linked my instruction to my student’s prior knowledge. An example of this is that I started with an introduction of Dr. Seuss because I knew that the students did not have a large prior knowledge about Dr. Seuss yet. For the following learning experiences in my unit, I built upon that prior knowledge and introduced more complex information/language/vocabulary, while still reviewing what had already been learned to help those who were not quite as far along. I linked student’s personal, cultural, and community assets by referencing those assets in my examples, comparisons, and prompts. For example, when I was talking about Dr. Seuss writing, I referenced the daily journals that the students complete in school. Another example would be when I said that the students receive awards when they show great work, just as Dr. Seuss received awards for his excellent work. In this manner, I linked my student’s development, prior learning, and personal, cultural, and community assets into my instruction.
Students with special needs need those extra accommodations. As a teacher, it is our role to know our students so well that we know what and how much assistance is necessary for each and every individual student. Some students may need assistive technology, some may need extra time, while others may need lots of review. A great teacher takes these accommodations into consideration and uses them with her students with special needs. In this way, individual needs are met, and these students have the chance to be able to thrive in the educational setting.
H. PARENT/TEACHER COLLABORATION STRATEGY

Collaborating with parents is a challenge in the early and special education classroom, especially if it is correspondence with a parent with a child with special needs. Our roles as educators is to establish a trusting and supportive relationship with families and that we have a classroom where children with disabilities and their parents feel understood and can share their concerns and questions without feeling offended. I personally feel, and Allen explains in more detail in her book *Creating Welcoming Schools* (2007), that all efforts made to have open and clear communication is important to assist with collaboration between the two parties. Thus, when I speak with parents, I believe the following ten strategies are important when collaborating with all families, but especially those families with children with special needs:

1. The first and greatest strategy, I feel, is to celebrate the small *and* large gains; to focus on strengths rather than deficits and weaknesses. I believe this is of utmost important because it gives the families positive self-esteem about their family. As families take on this positive self-esteem they can better cope with their situation and have hope for the future. I feel that focusing on the strengths helps families see that their work is not in vain. Celebration is key to bring joy, happiness, and a positive outlook on life; it is so crucial to have!

2. I feel that the second most important strategy to use is that of an on-look that families generally know what is best for their child and family. Families generally live together and kind of know what works for their family (and child) and what does not. They have likely spent more time with their child than we have (especially when they are just beginning the program). Thus, it is important to respect their decisions and practices, even if we feel they are ineffective or controversial. This is family-focused practice. As we, educators, give families a chance to share how they deal with particular situations, it empowers them and
develops trust between the program and them. I find this to be an essential step – in the long run – to be an effective strategy for success, collaboration, and trust.

3. The third strategy I find important is to respect the family’s decisions. I believe this strategy goes hand in hand with the previous strategy, but with this one the importance is that families have the right to make decisions that they see fit for their family based on their understanding and knowledge of their family. Whether we like the decision or not, families have to ultimately make the decision. This is family-centered practice. This again empowers the family, and gives them the self-motivation to do what is best for their family. As families make decisions, they play a crucial role in their child’s life. With the support of a good team, parents can change their course of action as they like – as they see what works and what does not. I believe it is extremely empowering for parents when their voice is heard and they are able to make decisions of their own, and, most likely, in the end there will be better cooperation between the family and the program.

4. The fourth strategy that I find is crucial is to communicate with the family – to share relevant information about what you are doing with their child and why you do what you do. Also, it is important to inform families about the skills and concepts that are being covered in the group setting and individual supports. This helps keep the family in the loop of things and involved in their child’s life, and it makes them confident that there is a purpose for their child’s education/work. Communication can be used via email, home-school notebooks, phone calls, or notes. This strategy provides strength between families and the program, as well as provide an intimate relationship. Communication is a great way to share those positive comments, to share progress, and to keep the family involved. I think this is an important strategy to use.
5. The fifth strategy I find to be crucial in working with families is to offer assistance that recognizes, builds on, and maintains family strengths, and that uses family resources and support networks as needed. Again, this is family centered practice – something that is key in working with families with disabilities. Assistance that recognizes family strengths is empowering, building on the strengths is rewarding, and maintaining the strengths is motivational. All these help counter-balance the weaknesses (the disability) of the family. It is a positive approach. I believe it is important to incorporate this strategy because it meets the needs of the family while keeping it positive.

6. The sixth strategy is identifying what supports parents may need in order to participate. This also kind of goes hand in hand with the previous strategy, except that it focuses on promoting participation by identifying needed supports. Some families are so overwhelmed or inexperienced that they don’t know what supports they need. As educators we need to help families identify what supports are available and which specific ones may be effective in their child’s participation. Supports are crucial to the success of the child, thus this strategy is one that is extremely important to incorporate.

7. The seventh strategy is really key also – that we acknowledge that we do not need to be the expert in everything. Each of us on the educational team are a member of the group and have unique roles and specialties. Thus, it is important to not come up with information we don’t know, but rather to explain to the family that we do not know the answer to it, but that we are willing to work with them to connect them to the resource to get the information. It is so evident that each member contributes their expertise which in turn develops a well-rounded team. The reality is that we are not experts in everything, thus we should not act like we are experts in everything.
8. The eighth strategy is to stress that the family is a member of the team, thus instead of using first person “I” when talking to families, we use words like “we” and “our”. Incorporating this strategy demonstrates that we are collaborating and respect the fact that each person is a member of the group. It also helps make concrete that one party does not have domination over others, but that all members have a respected voice. I feel that using such terminology helps build a community of trust and helps neutralize the atmosphere when discussing difficult topics. Thus, I believe this is an important strategy to use as well.

9. The ninth strategy is to realize that families “belong” to no one except themselves (their family). This means that each family is unique and deserves to be respected. As a member of their child’s educational team, it is important to consider because we should not dominate over them, rather we should “share” them to other providers and members of the team. This also dovetails on the previous strategies, but it focuses more on the family as being a unique unit that should be valued. Being valued is important for self-esteem, creates a sense of belonging, and helps bring the family closer together as a unit – especially if they have a child or children with special needs. The family deserves to belong and bond, therefore this strategy is important to encourage when working with families with special needs.

10. The tenth strategy (but not the final strategy) is to acknowledge the parents’ perspective. This strategy includes using phrases that acknowledges that we respect their perspective. Examples include, “I can certainly see why that is important to you…” or “I am aware that you feel this way….”. This is the strategy put into action – acknowledging and promoting the parent’s perspective. I believe this strategy is important to create parent-teacher collaboration, trust, and student success. It helps parents and teachers to be on the same page, and to work as a team toward a common goal.
I. SUMMARY

This Honors Capstone has been a compilation of my personal philosophy of education, helpful resources I plan to use, and reflections on my early and special education experiences thus far. It contains such topics as my personal philosophy of education, lesson plan strategies to keep in mind, and analysis of my own teaching experiences during student teaching. It also includes classroom equipment considerations and resource strategies, strategies for accommodating learners with disabilities, and strategies for parent/teacher collaboration. Following is a Reference page of the resources I used, Appendixes for lesson plans I have used, types of assistive technology discussed in the paper, and examples of parent/teacher collaboration methods.
J. REFERENCES


## J. APPENDIX A – LESSON PLAN EXAMPLES

### Example 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Bugs (State Standard)</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small Group/ Switch</strong></td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>Show &amp; Tell</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Centers</strong></td>
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<td>Block</td>
<td>Miss Ellyn</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art</strong></td>
<td>Spider</td>
<td>Bears</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dramatic Play</strong></td>
<td>Insect Wall</td>
<td>Spider</td>
<td>Spider</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Spider</td>
<td>Spider</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bugs &amp; Bottle Tops</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Motor Room</td>
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<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
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<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bears</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Circle Time

- **Spider**
- **Bears**

### Song/Fingerplay

- *Old Black Fly* (collect or give)
- *Hey Little Arm*

### Book

- *Old Black Fly*
- *Hey Little Arm*

### Daily Wrap-Up

- No
- Anya

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### Example 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Flowers/Mothers Day (State Standard)</th>
<th>Date: May 2 - 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small Group/ Switch</strong></td>
<td>Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Centers</strong></td>
<td>Miss Ellyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dramatic Play</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kneeling</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manipulatives</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature/Science</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Motor Room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Circle Time

- *Send Hope*

### Song/Fingerplay

- *Send Hope*

### Book

- *Send Hope*

### Daily Wrap-Up

- Assessment
  - (collect or give)
- Reflections

### Notes
Example 3

K. APPENDIX B – CLASSROOM EQUIPMENT EXAMPLES

Resource 1.1 - Smartboard
Resource 1.2 – Communication Devices and Programs (eg. Touch Chat)

Resource 1.3 – FM transmitter and receivers

L. APPENDIX C – PARENT TEACHER COLLABORATION EXAMPLES

Example 1.1 – Phone calls to families is a great way to communicate with families and help foster the collaboration process.
Example 1.2 – Personal notes to families also helps foster communication and collaboration between families and teachers.

Example 1.3 – Emails are also a great way to foster communication with parents, thus also fostering collaboration.