

From: Mrs. Laurie Fallon Western Dubuque High School Special Education Teacher
RE: Ms. Melissa Brinks Student teaching

Ali Alignment: Wisconsin Teaching Standard 2 Development – The teacher knows how children grow

I have had the pleasure of working with Ms. Brinks as a co-teacher in the Ag Fundamentals class as we work together to team teach during her student teaching experience. Ms. Brinks demonstrates qualities of an excellent Ag. Ed. Teacher. This is especially evident as she teams with me to prepare and teach lessons that are developed to work with students with varying degrees of learning disabilities. Some of the students have basic behavior issues such as staying on task while others who have autistic tendencies are in this class to develop social skills and have time to interact with peers. The biggest challenge for Ms. Brinks is to understand the ability of the students who are severely autistic..

She has demonstrated an ability to adapt and modify lessons to meet these varying levels of abilities. For example, she created a worksheet of the egg and its' parts in which students had to identify parts of the egg. She also developed a copy of the chart where students recorded the incubator environmental controls at (heat and humidity). She assisted me in developing a chart for the Alternative Assessment where the students document (via picture drawings) the stages of development with an egg as a chick grows inside of it.

Some of the other ways in which Ms. Brinks demonstrates a knowledge of how children grow is by creating hands-on and manipulative activities in which the special needs students differing learning modalities are enhanced as well as challenged. Some examples of these hands-on activities include the lessons that she assisted in creating which included everything from caring for tropical fish to incubating eggs and caring for chicks. She assisted creating a lesson in which students built bird houses to learn wood working skills. She has helped to create lessons in which students are learned how to plant and grow lettuce and she followed through with this in teaching them how to cook with lettuce and other plants grown in the hydroponics units. She also assisted in setting up an environment in which students assisted in raising tilapia fish (feeding, caring for, cleaning the tanks, etc.) and then when the fish were fully grown, she assisted the students in practice with filleting the fish. After filleting the fish, she brought the students to the life skills center and they prepared, cooked and ate this fish. I believe that this is an excellent lesson in the process of agriculture from the beginning to the end of food production.

Along with teaching, Ms. Brinks is aware of the importance of appropriately setting up social experiences within her classroom, as she teaches the lessons. She creates social interaction time by having class time to connect with their peers who have similar abilities. She recognizes how they can help each other. She recognizes that students also learn how to work together and creates the environment to make this happen..

UW-Platteville - Knowledge, Skills, and Disposition Standards: KSD2.c – Manages Classroom Procedures.

While teaching the Ag. Fundamentals class, Ms. Brinks has had many classroom management challenges, but she handled them with patience, calmness and persistence. With this level of special needs students, she recognized that she had to constantly keep students motivated by assigning them to small groups in which they could teach each other and learn how to work together. For example she had one group of four students filling up fish tanks and testing the

water for the amounts of nitrates, nitrites, pH and other important factors while another group of two students would label eggs for the incubator while another group of three students will be emptying the manure and filtration barrels for the hydroponics units. She used a lot of verbal praise such as “that is a nice job, Brandon.” “You are doing good work, Michael.” “That is exactly what I wanted you to do, nice work!” This positive discipline motivates these students to want to do their best work and keeps them from looking for attention through inappropriate behaviors. At times, students may have tried to ‘look for mischief’ and Ms. Brinks constantly had her eyes and ears open and ready to redirect when this type of activity appeared to be brewing up! She would simply do just that...redirect them to another activity that caught their attention. For example, she may ask them to write something on the board or run an errand to the office so that the next activity of the day would be ready to go. This redirecting of the students worked very well with this group of special needs students.

Ms. Brinks demonstrated management techniques by always having lessons prepared ahead of time and she was ready to adapt and adjust these lessons as necessary as the class period unfolded. Her friendly, yet firm discipline style allows students to relax and want to be in her classroom. Her ability to prepare creative, hands-on lessons is a very positive aspect to her teaching style and allows classroom management to occur naturally.