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Final Reflection

One of the most important things that I learned in the beginning of this course was the difference between validity and reliability, and how to craft assessments that are valid and reliable. Before taking this class, I knew about validity and reliability in a nebulous sense, and had an idea that I should be using these concepts in my classroom, but was not equipped to actually apply this knowledge.

From now on, I will be thinking carefully about exactly what I am wanting my students to learn, and how to best assess what they know. Later on in the course, I found the article "Grading and Differentiation: Paradox or Good Practice?" to be incredibly eye-opening. I have always tried to focus on students' progress, rather than assigning grades. In fact, I already followed the article's advice that formative assessment should not be graded. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to explain this practice to parents and administrators who want everything to be graded.

In addition, I frequently will assign tests and quizzes that accompany the textbook series out of convenience and ease of use. After examining validity and reliability, I am realizing that these tests and quizzes (which may not be properly aligned to standards, and are definitely not aligned to my teaching) are not appropriate to use in the classroom. They do not test on information the students have learned, and therefore they are not going to give me any useful information about the students' progress.

The TABs chart was another important tool. Conceptually, it was important for me to see the TABs form to help me understand the need to observe a variety of behaviors to determine giftedness. The TABs project was eye-opening in that it forced me to consider program fit, soemthing I had never considered before. In my current school district, as well as in the district where I grew up, if a person is labeled "gifted," he or she participates in whatever programming option is available. In fact, within schools in my district, gifted services differ greatly. At certain schools, all gifted students are pulled out for gifted science, while at other schools all gifted students are pulled out for gifted math.

In reflecting on the Georgia eligibility rule, I am reminded of Florida's eligibility rule. Unfortunately, a score on an IQ test continues to be the main criterion used. In Florida, students are eligible for gifted programming if he or she demonstrates 1) a need for a special program, 2) a majority of characteristics of gifted students according to a standard scale or checklist, and 3) superior intellectual development as measured by an intelligence quotient of two standard deviations or more above the mean on an individually administered standardized test of intelligence. Students from underrepresented socioeconomic groups or students who have limited English proficiency can qualify with a lower IQ score, but the score is still a major part of the identification process, and students must have a 118 IQ minimum (and that is only if the student has excellent achievement test scores and displays many characteristics of giftedness).

As I read Florida's eligibility rule for gifted, I started to realize that the practices used at my own school may not be in accordance with Florida law. We use an alternative identification plan (described above), and this system can greatly benefit students of lower socioeconomic status. However, the system does not account for any cultural biases in the standardized tests used. At my school, our guidance counselor uses a prescreening measure before she will test

students for gifted using the intelligence test. If the students do not pass this prescreening measure, given in a group test format, they are not tested for gifted. Now that I have done research on Florida law, I do not know that this practice is in agreement with the statutes. Hopefully, I will be able to act as an advocate for potentially gifted students at my school.

Finally, the performance assessment task was the most important project that I worked on in this class. I have been a teacher for three years, and I have really strived to make fair assessments and interesting projects. Reading "Grading and Assessment in the Differentiated Classroom" and the class notes on the topic made me realize that I was really falling flat in terms of creating assessments that were worthy of my students. I was making projects that merely required students to report on information they already knew; there was no critical thinking, application of knowledge, or creativity involved. I was using rubrics that were too detailed and rigid, allowing no room for students to express themselves creatively.

As I completed the performance assessment task project, I really started to think about how I could improve the assignments that I ask my students to complete. I used the RAFT model, especially the idea of roles and an authentic audience, to think about how I could improve what I was asking the students to do in class.

Overall, I have learned a great deal in this class that I will be taking back to my classroom. I am very excited to create valid, reliable assessments that will more accurately monitor my students' progress in the core subject areas. I am eager to write out my rubrics and project descriptions for our special units at the end of the year. I look forward to grading my students' work more fairly, and with regard to their learning process.