Student Characteristics:

Describe the developmental characteristics of students in your classroom.

**Cognitive:** capable of higher levels of reasoning, abstract thinking, making connections between different concepts, analyzing events with multiple causes and effects, and are beginning to understand how the past, present, and future connect, and are becoming more interested in the world at large and subjects like social issues and politics

**Physical:** puberty mostly complete in girls, various stages of puberty for boys, rapid gain in height, improvement in fine and gross motor skills, wide range of abilities to control emotions and make decisions, hormonal imbalances resulting in acne, moodiness, and fatigue

**Social:** value peer interactions, identity lies in group of friends, short-term planning guided by peers, egocentric

**Emotional:** high expectations, low self-esteem, feelings of omnipotence, seeking independence, popularity, friends, feelings of love, and reassurance from teachers and peers

Highlight the prior knowledge and interests of students in your classroom.

In my focus class, Varsity Choir, the students were all juniors and seniors, meaning that they had auditioned into the top-auditioned traditional choir (Chamber Choir) and had at least one to three years of experience in one or more of the other choirs. Varsity is the lower of the two select small ensembles created from members of the Chamber Choir. These students have a concept of proper vocal production, can read music, and utilize solfege to sight-read. They are interested in learning the techniques for small ensemble performance and for singing a cappella pop music, as well as the challenges presented by more difficult contest-type pieces. These students are also interested in becoming more independent musicians, the opportunity for increased public performance, and the possibility of advancement into POPS choir.

Describe the implications these characteristics have on planning and instruction.

(e.g. *What instructional strategies will you use to meet the unique learning needs of all your students?*)

Due to the desire of the students to become more independent musicians, I challenged students to sight-read a cappella and provided them opportunities to solve problems and try again several times before giving piano support. I also allowed them the opportunity to make their own decisions in regards to phrasing and several other musical details to give them ownership of the ensemble. Given that it was a small group, we did a lot of team-building exercises and had outside ensemble-bonding time in order to build a safe environment for their first time singing in a small group.

Environmental Factors:
Describe district, school, and classroom environmental factors impacting the quality of education for all of your students.

The district and administration are very proud of the choral program and its accomplishments and are very supportive as long as the support they can provide does not involve any support of spending. The district seems to not see the need to support the program as far as assistance funding for important events like KMEA conference performances and competition in regional and state contests. The choral program is forced to fundraise to pay for these events out of their budget, leaving less room for purchase of instructional materials. This puts a bit of a chip on the shoulder of the students and drives them to try and prove they are worthy of more support.

The classroom environment is very warm, welcoming, and student-friendly. Class begins the same way every day and students practice this multiple times each class on the first few days of school in order to establish this routine. At the beginning of class, students walk in and see board work and a time projected on the board. Students get out supplies, complete board work, and stand silently ready to begin at the time designated on the board. At the beginning of the year, expectations are established and practiced for how to sit, stand, and placement of cell phones and other belongings. Students feel safe and at-ease knowing what to expect at the beginning of class each day.

Describe community and family environmental factors impacting the quality of education for all of your students.

The community and students’ families are very supportive of the choral program and pack the auditorium for concerts and love to help out with whatever they can. Community members often make small donations to the choral program in exchange for Varsity or POPS performances at various community events. There is also a performing arts support group made up of parents of students in the performing arts that advocate for the program and fundraise to provide supplemental financial and other forms of support for the music and drama programs.

Describe the implications these factors have on planning and instruction. (What instructional strategies will you use to address the unique environmental factors impacting each student?)

Since families and the community are so supportive, it is important to keep them informed about performances and other important things going on in the choral program in order to keep that support. In order to do this, posters were made and put up around town for concerts and to advertise POPS and Varsity to perform at their events. I had an online calendar that anyone could subscribe to have fed into their personal calendar that was updated constantly. Since the school website was going through the process of being redone, teachers were not able to make any changes to their classroom pages. As an alternative, a DropBox folder was used that students and parents could subscribe to that contained the handbook, medical release forms, link to the online calendar, practice files, links to videos teaching the music literacy bootcamp, and other resources. Update and reminder e-mails were sent out to parents frequently via Infinite Campus. Updates and reminders regarding performances, rehearsals, and any other important information were also posted via an MHS Choirs Twitter account for students, parents, and community members to access. The lack of budget forces the usage of music that is public domain or already in the library. In some ways, this
benefitted the choirs because more early music and choral standards were chosen that might not have been considered otherwise, providing a richer and more diverse selection of music for students.