I signed up to participate in the C.L.A.S.S. conference because it seemed like a fast, easy and much cheaper way to get my literacy elective done. However, I got so much more out of my experience than I ever imagined! It truly was an inspirational three days of interacting with amazing people, absorbing innovative ideas and learning unique ways to engage students in their learning. I never imagined that I would leave feeling so refreshed and excited about sharing and implementing the countless strategies that I learned.

This paper is an attempt to describe what I learned over those three days. In it, I will discuss what I gained from watching the Power Shots, during our learning club and the individual sessions I attended. I will connect those learnings to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards and discuss how these learnings will ultimately impact my teaching practice. Finally, I will outline how I plan to implement them immediately in my work.

Before the conference started, I decided to get a jumpstart by watching the Power Shots. The first one I watched was titled Vocab Remix. In it, Ruby shared strategies to use to engage students in learning vocabulary words in a meaningful way.

*Vocab swim and Vocab basketball*

Ruby talked about the importance of getting students up and moving every 15-20 minutes to give their mind and body a break from sitting. She talked about the fact that students learn better through movement so both of these approaches utilize movement as the foundation for helping students learn. These strategies gave students a way to learn vocabulary that you could tell was fun and interesting. Plus every student in the class was actively engaged. Each student seemed to be focused on each letter and excited about learning.

This helped me realize that there are many different ways to get students interested in learning that is fun and engaging. I enjoyed how Ruby was able to take a boring subject like vocabulary and turn it in to an exciting experience that the whole class was interested in and clearly enjoyed. Plus, the integration of movement helps the student retain the information for longer periods than just trying to remember them on their own.

CEC standard 5 fits this strategy the most in my opinion. Ruby was able to take her knowledge of brain research and combine it with content, which in this Power Shot was vocabulary, and adapt and use a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies to advance learning of all the students in the class. What’s just as important to note is that this strategy can be duplicated to fit the needs of individuals with exceptionalities across a range of content areas.

As teachers, we will have a diverse group of students with different academic levels, skills and personal experiences; we must be open to discovering and using a variety of approaches to engage all learners. Once you have your learning objectives identified in order of their importance, then you can design the specific activities to use to get students to understand and apply what they have learned.

Ruby demonstrated a creative way to introduce the topic to students which automatically stimulated their interest, encouraged thinking and kept them engaged in the lesson. She also modeled several different ways of teaching the same content which if used interchangeably will keep students more engaged and on track. These were great examples, of ways to catch the attention of students and appeal to different learning styles. In summary, these strategies help teachers do their work better while, at the same time, helping students become better thinkers and learners.

*Parent Power*

In this Power Shot, Ruby focused on strategies to share with parents that reinforce positive behaviors in the home. The strategies she introduced combined the C.L.A.S.S. strategies of Life Goals, Lifelines, procedures, and collaboration into simple ideas that parents could teach, emphasize and model in the home. This idea not only empowers the parents but it helps parents support the development of their children's character and social skills which ultimately aids greatly in increased performance at school. Plus, this produces stronger relationships with parents, increases communication, and grows parent support.

I believe that this strategy aligns with CEC Standard 7. I choose number 7 because it emphases collaboration between teachers and families. As teachers it is important for us to understand our students' backgrounds, such as culture and family life, because it will affect their learning and maintenance of the knowledge they gain. Working with and understanding our families, we are better equipped to meet the unique learning needs of our students and families in culturally responsive ways. When teachers understand families and communicate and build relationships with them, students benefit. I understand that in order to be an effective teacher, I must be prepared to collaborate with families to support student success.

Meeting the needs of diverse learners

I participated in two of the sessions presented by Theresa. The first was Super Strategies for Special Needs and the other was It is a Bird, it is a Plane..It is SPRW for everyone!!!! Both focused on how teachers can meet the needs of diverse learners, including those with special needs. The information helped me think about the ways in which I can engage diverse learners and students with special needs in meaningful ways.

These workshops aided me in realizing that the first step in helping my student is by making an effort to understand who each individual student is and their unique skills, interests, strengths, and weaknesses. This helps facilitate a connection with the student who is much more likely to be open to listening and learning from me. As mentioned, emotion drives attention which drives learning.

Next, it helped me consider the question of: when a student leaves my program or classroom, what skills, knowledge, and abilities do I want the student to leave with? This doesn’t just apply to the academic curriculum but include the social, emotional and interpersonal skills students need to succeed in the future.

I also learned about how to incorporate Say it!, Play it! Relay it! And Weigh it! (SPRW). This structure gives teachers a resource to create meaningful learning opportunities that catch students’ attention plus provide them with unique opportunities to process, practice and express what they are learning. Lastly, it equips teachers with multiple options for assessing student knowledge. This framework ensures that all children are given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in ways that allow them to use their strengths while working to improve their weaknesses.

So now, when I start developing outcomes for my classroom or the afterschool program, I will begin with broad goals for all learners. However, during the lesson, I will keep in mind the many ways that children learn and include instructions in different modalities. I understand that being an effective teacher means delivering a strong curriculum that provides all students the opportunity to go as far as they possibly can go. A good teacher is also able to incorporate activities that teach students to value each other and be prepared to live in a world of diversity.

I choose CEC standard 1 to align with to these learning sessions. This standard focuses on the importance of beginning special education professional’s knowledge and understanding of how exceptionalities may interact with development and learning. What’s important is that they are then able to use this information to provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences for unique individuals.

My reflection on my knowledge of this standard is related to the broad understanding of the individual learning differences of diverse learners. It cannot be stated enough how important it is for teachers in special education to understand the different characteristics of each of their students. Students learn by different methods, at different rates and retain and recall information differently. Not all students have families that speak English. Some families may speak Spanish or Chinese. One culture will place more value on particular traditions or areas of life than another culture. Understanding these differences will impact what is important for our students to learn and how we shape their curriculum.

Learning Clubs

The Learning Clubs was a great way to bring a diverse group of individuals together to discuss their varied learnings of the days we spent together. It allowed me an opportunity to hear what information was presented in other workshops and offered different perspectives on information heard in ones that I had participated in as well as the opening sessions. This offered me a deeper connection to the people and the ideas presented.

I also enjoyed the activities that we done. The one I enjoyed the most was having the young people come in to present their lesson on courage. I was so amazed by the growth I seen over the three days. I also really liked the hero activity in which we were encouraged to write encouraging notes to others. I received one and I know it meant a lot to me. I also wrote several and not only did I feel good writing them but I could tell how much they meant to the people I gave them to. In some small way, I feel that it made us just a little bit closer. Lastly, I enjoyed writing the note to myself to be mailed at a future time. I made sure to include questions to see if I had implemented any of the ideas and strategies that I learned during the conference. I felt so good at the moment I wrote it that I can’t wait to receive it so that I can remind myself of this great experience.

I feel that CEC Standard 7 is most appropriate for this approach because it highlights the importance of education professionals working with other educators and related service providers in order to address the needs of all students, especially those with exceptionalities. This is important, as we discussed in the learning clubs, to improving retention in the field and fostering teacher satisfaction. Like we talked about, teachers are much more likely to stay in schools that have an integrated professional culture where teachers’ needs are recognized and all teachers share responsibility for student success.

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| **Action Plan** |
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| * Get to know my students and their families personally. * Find unique ways to meet their individual needs. * Incorporate fun, interesting and engaging activities to meet their needs. * Work collaboratively with families, educators and related service providers to meet students’ needs. * Take care of myself. |

I never would’ve imagined how inspired and refreshed I feel having had the opportunity to participate in CLASS. I was inspired to be the best person and teacher I can be. I was also given some amazing ideas and strategies to use to help students enjoy learning. I am so glad I decided to participate and I’ve been telling others about my experience to encourage them to participate next year, I know I will.