**Contextual Factors in Teaching and Learning**

**As a beginning teacher:**

It is good to explore contextual factors around your new school. Exploring contextual factors means that you will be 'scouting out' the context of the classroom including the physical environment, classroom routines, and curriculum, and getting to know the class and individual students and groups of students. All of this information will help you to determine what you will teach in your lessons and should suggest teaching strategies and approaches most likely to lead to student learning. Focus your observations and journaling on this topic, and ask your mentor teacher, if available, to talk to you about less visible or less noticeable student characteristics that you should be aware of.

It can be challenging to think about how large-scale factors can influence individual classroom practices, but it is important to understand that each school has its own unique culture and identity and that lessons and strategies do not usually transfer from school to school without adaptation for the context. It is therefore important to reflect on the diversity of your specific classroom including the prevailing student characteristics. Below are some suggestions you might explore, but feel free to make other connections on your own:

* It is good to review student demographic and achievement data, to get a big picture of the school as a whole and your class in particular.
* Talk to your mentor teacher about professional development and school improvement initiatives in your school as well as school-wide programs, character education, family support/parent education, and other factors important to understanding the values and priorities of your school and the community at large.

In addition, it is also important to identify student characteristics related to gender, interests and student skill levels and physical characteristics of the classroom. You may address the student characteristics of an entire class, the characteristics of a group of students, or some combination of individual, group, or whole class characteristics, but be careful to choose characteristics that will have the greatest impact on your lesson so that you are planning for success. You might also need to discuss the potential implications these characteristics have for instruction for an individual, group, or an entire class. With experience and a consistent application of effort, you will become increasingly skilled at matching student characteristics to teaching strategies. For any new teacher, this may be the most challenging part of the Contextual Factors.

**Source:**

<http://www.uni.edu/coe/departments/department-teaching/field-experiences/level-2/contextual-factors>