

# Teacher Interview: Glenda Crocker

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**Imagine someone visited your class several times, what would they say the principal teaching strategies you use are? Could you talk about teaching strategies you use that are universal, and as well as strategies are somewhat unique to you and your personality?**

All teachers now I know are using small group and they know the importance of differentiation within our classroom. We may teach some things whole group, but we know that we have to differentiate in order to meet the needs of these children. One thing that I think we all are doing is realizing how important global awareness and diversity is in our nation today. That what we do affects other people; what they do affect us, and we need to be teaching children the value of appreciating diversity. There's more than one way to get a right answer to a question. We need to be respectful of each other and listen and learn from each other. I would say that's something all teachers are trying to do and realize the importance of. One thing that I really focus on in this classroom is making connections, making things relevant. We make sure that it means something to us because I know as a learner, even as old as I am and as many years as I've been teaching, if something doesn't mean or connect to me, I'm more likely to lose it, and the things that I hold valuable – and I think that's how all of us are – if it has a value to me, and I can see it and using it later in life, and I try to get the children to realize, all these things you won't understand. Just like this morning, our American contributors, they're not going to remember all those things, but the next time they hear it, it will ring that bell. They will begin to really make a connection, and throughout their life, they are going to come back and remember some of these first grade...the things they learned in first grade because of that valuable relevance in their life and that connection they make, so I hope that that is something that I feel like I do every day and one of my more important strategies along with the ones that we all do, and we all have our little thing that we feel like is maybe particular to us that we do, and I think that would be it.

**How do you organize your class to maximize learning opportunities for your students? How do you help them become better learners?**

When a child is not here, or something, one of them is not in the group, we just switch over. Sometimes we just switch over simply because maybe a child got that yesterday, or one didn't and we said, "well, maybe they need a little bit more writing today; maybe this child..." Sometimes we just do it because children don't need to feel like "I'm always part of this group; I'm always..." we are a classroom community, and I stress that. We may be with this group today and with this group tomorrow, but we are all a group, and one thing that I'm very particular about...I think worksheets, there is value to a worksheet. They have to know how to answer worksheets. They have to know how to fill out a job application, a specific thing, but in order for maximum learning to take place, we have to concentrate on these thought questions, on questions, "Why do you feel? What did you find out in this book? How do you know this is happening?" We have to go to that higher order thinking.

**How do you differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with special needs (EC, ESL, AIG, etc.)?**

I would say the most important thing that I've...the most important strategy that I think I've used is...is mainly the proximity. I stay closer to those children; I give them more individual help as far as going around to them and staying longer with them, so that it's not something that you, hopefully, will pick up on right when you come into the classroom because that shouldn't...for the child's sake it shouldn't be that they are quickly identified to somebody else. The main thing is the collaboration between myself and the special ed area teachers. We have ESL; we might have hearing impaired, speech, EC. When you stay in contact with these teachers, they may be on the other end of the campus, but we talk, not once a month or not once a week. We talk, if not daily, every other day. We stop; we tell, "What are you doing? What am I doing? How is this going?" We even have parent conferences together. If it's...if it's ESL, we a lot of times talk even more, and then maybe the ESL teacher will come in and translate. Many times we're together...the telephone conversations, everything, so that nobody's parents are left not knowing what's going on.

**How do you know when learning is occurring and what do you do when you question whether learning is taking place in the classroom?**

I can tell when learning is taking place by the answers I get to my questions, even the expressions on their faces. The other day I saw a child, and I said, "Honey, you're looking right at me and you not thinking about a thing I've said are you?" You can see, and I think that's one of those things you pick up on year after year when you've been teaching; it becomes even easier the longer you teach. That you can look at a child and we can see that blank stare, and a lot of times that's what we call falling through the cracks...is they look like they're looking at me, so what we...what I try and do is what, you may see it on the video, the active. I say, "Boys and girls, we are active learners; we are not passive. That is why you are going to write these two things. When you go back, everybody's expected to have something to share." When I'm questioning students, I have, as you may have seen on the video, I have the same seven or eight, like most all classrooms, that want to do all the talking and then the other ones sit there and just passively..."That's fine. Just go ahead and let them talk." I make...I won't say make...I encourage them or stand by them until they want to say something or until maybe they feel like they can say something. I try to encourage them by not saying, "That's a wrong answer," but by saying, "That's interesting," or, "Do you need a little bit of help?" "Maybe you want to think about this?" I always...many times...I'll say many times give wait time, and I'll say, "Boys and girls, I'm going to ask you a question. When I say 'tell me' it means..." and then I wait a few seconds. Those that are not as quick of responders might respond. I can tell by their writing. I think that's a very good basis for whether they're understanding, too, is their writing. Also when I have self-selected reading, it's a one-on-one. I don't get to everybody every day, but I walk around, "What are you reading? Tell me about it."

### **How do you “hook” a reluctant learner to your content?**

I try and single them out, actually, and will, if they have done something...many times you hear, “Well, what does that child do?” Everybody has something that they excel. Everybody has an interest, and when I can find that a child has done something, I do draw the interest to them, trying not to make...not go to the front of the class or that, but maybe just go to their desk and say, “Well that is a wonderful idea!” And even saying it loudly, not like I’m trying to get the class’s attention, but you will get the class’s attention, and then they look over at that person, and I say, “That is a great idea!” It’s like we’re having a one-on-one conversation, but I’m doing it so loud that everybody can hear, and then you’ll...drawing them in that way, it is a process. It may take weeks. Also, finding out what they’re interested in. These children will come around, and pulling them in slightly, little by little, a lot of times in a group, I’ll let them be the leader in a small group. When we’re doing our little group activities, you’ve always got the ones that want to be the leader, and then you’ve got the ones that...and I’ll say, “Why don’t you be the leader today?” Of course, they don’t particularly want to and then you say, “But I think you’d be a great leader, so let’s just try it today.” And a lot of times pulling them in in that little two to three group will get them more ready to take an active part.

### **If you were to give advice to a new teacher in North Carolina, what 2-3 learnings would you share?**

I would say, “Make sure they are writing.” This is an age of writing. Make sure that they are engaged in something that’s worthwhile. We’ve all heard...in fact I was at a workshop years ago when somebody said, “Well we know when we work in groups we’re just giving children things to do to keep them busy.” No. A child is too smart for that. Many of them are, and when you get up and you just pass out a worksheet and say, “Now I’m going to work with this group. Now y’all do this.” That’s not...that’s not active learning for a child that needs to spend the time...we don’t have enough time in the school day the way it is. I would say, “Make sure they’re writing, and you’re giving them something purposeful to do. Make sure that they know you care.” It’s one thing to be professional, and then it’s another thing to try and be professional, but yet, they need that...we all need that human figure. The one that we can go to and get some understanding, and I would say the writing, the communication, making sure the children feel like they can speak, and that we have that community of learners, and they do not feel fear of being rejected, or fear that their class mates are going to make fun of them. And this takes...this takes several weeks to do that, but children need to feel safe within our classroom, and not physically safe, but safe to express our ideas.