

Interview Transcript: Carrie Morris

Question 1: 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 that are somewhat unique to you and your personality?

Teaching strategies that I think that someone would see consistently in my classroom are different ones. I don't think I do the same thing every day. Sometimes we are doing group work, sometimes I am up talking, and sometimes we are working with partners. I think it's different all the time and I think what keeps it fun and exciting. My personality is one that I am not having fun then I think that my students aren't having fun so I go every day to school to have fun and that's what I try to do and I think that someone who came into my classroom would see that I like to have a classroom where students are enjoying themselves. We are laughing, we are joking we are having a good time. I teach 5th graders and they have quite a personality by that age. So we are able to enjoy ourselves. So universal teaching strategies I believe changing up is important doing the same thing that students expect everyday gets old. I think it's important to keep students on their toes and have them always looking forward to what are we going to do today?

Question 2: How do you organize your class to maximize learning opportunities for your students? How do you help them become better learners?

I think the biggest thing about organizing my class is setting my expectations from the start. My students need to know at the very, very first day of school that they have some responsibilities – they also have some rights - but they have some responsibilities that I need them to do. So I think if you set the standards straight off from the beginning of what is expected from students and what you want to accomplish the rest of the year goes very well. In my class because I teach 5th grade and we study the US Constitution we create a classroom constitution. We look at our founding fathers and how they began to create a new government from other government and other models from the past. So I ask them to talk about their wonderful educational experiences they have had up to 5th grade and let's use those to create a really great learning environment in 5th grade. We create an environment for our class by doing that at the beginning it makes learning very effective because they know what I expect from them but they also know that they also have rights and responsibilities and things that they can do throughout the year.

Question 3: How do you differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with special needs (EC, ESL, AIG, etc.)?

Well I think that that goes down to knowing your students and it's really important to have a relationship with each and every single student. And when you have that relationship then you start to recognize that every student has strengths and every student has weaknesses. We don't look at it as

labels of AIG or ESL - we look at it as strengths and weaknesses, and where one student may be strong and another student may be weak - and we all have that. I don't think it's so important to differentiate with labels for different students' needs. I think it's more important for us to that to recognize that we all have things that we are good at and we all have things that we are poor at and we are there to help each other. That something I feel really strongly about. I might have a student who is a poor reader but they might be the fastest student in the class when they go to PE. How can that student help another student be faster and then another student coach that student to be a better reader? And vice-versa. So we look at it as strengths and weaknesses and we are all there to help each other.

Question 4: How do you know when learning is occurring and what do you do when you question whether learning is taking place in the classroom?

Well obviously the light bulbs you see - the kids just say "I get it" but then also then when you talk to them - it goes back to knowing your students and talking to them. You talk to your students; you know where they started from - knowing their background knowledge. Whatever you do - pretesting, surveys, whatever you do at the beginning of the lesson Where they came from and where they are going to. Assessment of course is important. But I think it goes back to knowing your students and talking to them. You can tell when they are learning - by just their "ahas," by the things they are excited about, by the amount of effort they are putting into something. And then also of course there is regular data that teachers use - the pre-testing the post-testing, the assessments, the quick checks here and there and those kinds of things. But you put it all together and it comes down to knowing every single student.

Question 5: How do you "hook" a reluctant learner to your content?

That's when once again you need to know their interests and their strengths. And when you find out what they are really good at, most people love to talk about or to do what they are good at, so if you can somehow take something that is a strength for a child and link that they are not enjoying and having a hard time with that's how to hook them. I find for me in 5th grade, it's Science a lot of times how I grasp those kids who are maybe struggling readers or who are struggling with math - is a science investigation. If I can connect that with something we are reading or doing with math, that's the best way to hook those kids that have a hard time with education.

Question 6: If you were to give advice to a new teacher in North Carolina what 2-3 learnings would you share?

I think that number one, the most important thing is to know your students. Find out about their likes and dislikes. Meet their parents even if you have to go to their house, or their grandparents or their aunts and uncles or their extended family that they live with. Meet their brothers and sisters. Meet their families, get to know them, find out the things that they like to do. I live in the community in which

I teach, which I think is a huge benefit because my neighbors are my students, a lot of them. And I think that is really important. If you get to know your students not as just students but as neighbors, as a part of your community, I think that is the best thing you that can do to be the most effective teacher. So that is number one – be part of your students' lives. Number two – I think it is very important to be current, to stay attuned to what they are interested in and to bring those things into the classroom so that they can see the relevance of what they are learning in school and in their future life. And I think third, be able to have enough knowledge to also bring the past and the mistakes of our history to the present time. I think it's important that teachers have enough knowledge about the past to recognize to kids that these things have happened in the past, and how can we make a difference? And to just have a wealth of things that you can pull from that will get the kids interested and motivated out of wherever they are in life.