

What the Best NC Teachers Do – Transcript

Teacher: Linda West

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 are somewhat unique to you and your personality?

Linda West: I believe that the biggest teaching strategy that I use in my classroom is using my student organization, HOSA for future health professionals. It's a student –led organization for students who think they want to become a future health professional. In that organization, it affords me various opportunities and ways to present materials, have the students present the material using the various competitive events. I try very hard to be very professional, to be a role model for these students in my teaching strategies as well as, for lack of a better word, storytelling. I utilize a lot of the instances that I had professionally when I was working as a registered nurse, to teach the diseases and to teach the concepts of actually doing hands-on patient care.

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

Linda West: The first thing I do is to teach students various brain activities. This morning, when you videotaped the class, you got to see a couple of those activities; nose touches and firecrackers. I didn't invent them; there's lots of brain activities that you can go online and find for yourself. I was in a workshop several years ago and that was one of the strategies that they taught us to use with our students. Supposedly, when you reach school-age, your left brain and right brain stop talking to each other, and one of the ways to get them back talking to each other and to increase test scores and to increase your IQ score is to do things to promote that communication like the nose touches and firecrackers that you saw this morning.

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

Linda West: I work with the EC department at my school and get strategies from them. My background is not in EC, my background is not in education; I'm lateral-entry. I work with the EC department to better educate EC students. In addition to that, I again use my HOSA competitive events to help me get those messages and material that I am supposed to teach across to the students in a format that they can learn it in. I know that not all teachers have access to a student organization that's related directly to their program, but all teachers can go online and pull up the various Career and Technical Education organization websites and pull up our competitive events. There's rubrics that go with the competitive events. If you want your students to do a poster that would teach the information, like a disease in health or even a math concept, there are rubrics on our websites that allow you to easily manipulate and grade those activities as well as let the students know what you expect from that information that

you're trying to get them to portray. A brochure, even, that you would like to use as a teaching activity for your students. Creating a brochure to have them teach other people... There's just all sorts of information that's available to us teachers out there that will help us get that information across as well as meet the needs of our students in the classroom.

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?

Linda West: I guess the biggest thing is that I am very observant. You can see in a student's eyes when that light comes on and they've got the information or when that light comes on and they're interested in the information. Just this morning, I was reviewing information for a circulatory system test and half of the class was not getting it. I've spent two weeks on the circulatory system; I could spend more, but I can't afford to spend more time. I've got more things to cover. They were just not into the review, I was very worried about how they were going to do on this test they were going to take on the circulatory system tomorrow. What I did was I incorporated "HOSA Bowl" which is like a quiz bowl. I divided the class up into teams and I take the actual test questions and I read them out to the students because I have students of all different reading levels in my classroom. I need to let them hear those questions read correctly. They take the test. After the test, we actually sit in the class, and I got this one from a professor when I was taking my reading in the content-area course; we sat in the class and read every test question after the test out loud and went over it. That's what I do with my students in class. Some of the students cannot pronounce the words on the test and I've got to make sure they can pronounce those words. If they cannot pronounce them to themselves or out loud, then they're not going to be able to do well on those tests that they have to take at the end of the year or the end of the semester. That's a strategy that I use in the class and sometimes, you can see, "Oh yeah... that's what they're talking about here."

One other strategy that I use that I didn't mention earlier is, if a student didn't make proficiency on a test, I allow them to go back and take that test over again. They can't take it the same day. They have to come after school or before school to take the test. But there's no rule that says we don't get a re-take. There's no rule that says we don't get the opportunity to take that test again. Even as adults, even as teachers, we get chances to make up and do things correctly that we did not do correctly the first time. I afford that opportunity to my students as well, because they deserve that chance. They may have had a bad day or a bad night before... who's to say they just didn't feel like studying... so that's what I do.

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

Linda West: If I have a student who is reluctant in my content area, one of the things that I try to stress to them is that even if you don't think you want to be a health care professional, all of us are going to be health care consumers. If you can be a better health care consumer and be more knowledgeable about yourself and be more knowledgeable about your body, be more knowledgeable about your health care delivery system, you are going to be a better consumer. You are going to be better taken care of if you are more knowledgeable or if you have more education in that area. Therefore, if I can't get them hooked just because they want to be a health care professional, I'm hoping that I can hook them

because they may find themselves taking care of one of their own family members one day and they want to be better able to take care of them.

Another thing I try to teach the students is that while they might not like my class, they might not like being in here, but you're in here. What type of health care professional do you want taking care of you? Someone who made a 50, which is the minimum score on the national test or do you want someone who scored a 90 on the national test taking care of you. With that being said, what type of student do you want to be? That 50 or that 90?

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

Linda West: Number one, plan your work and work your plan. Nancy Raynor, who was the Health Occupation chief consultant at the state department in the career and technical education section, that was her by word. That was what she taught us as new teachers. Plan your work and work your plan. If you do that, yes you are going to have things that happen, unexpected assemblies... but if you plan your work and then follow through, then you'll be better off. It's a good tactic to teach our students as well.

Another piece of advice that I received as a new teacher was that it is easier to loosen up than it is to tighten up. My principal that hired me, Julius Walker, shared that advice with me. He repeated it over and over again and it really is. It's a lot easier to loosen up once you've got all of your students in sync and doing what you want them to do than it is to try to tighten up later.

Other advice would be to read your journals, be open-minded to new concepts... go observe other teachers who you consider to be master teachers. I served as a master teacher for health occupations for several years and I've had students from various counties, Pitt County, Martin County, Gates County... come in and observe me teaching and spend a day with me and just pick my brain for all it's worth and ask questions and get teaching strategies to help them better their own programs in their own high schools.