

What the Best NC Teachers Do – Transcript

Teacher: Pam Mills

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?

Pam Mills: If someone walked in my room, they would see me constantly walking around the room looking at my students. The way I have my room arranged allows for me to interact in groups of two and three and four. You'll find me very close to my students. You'll find me listening when they speak. I think that closeness that I have with them, when they're giving an answer or when we're discussing, that eye contact; that's one of my strategies to know that I am close in the conversation and the comments they are making mean a lot to me if I am there. That's one of my strategies. I'm a good listener to my students. I also try to tap in to their creativity by having "Open Mic Fridays" where they can read any poetry or stories or essays they have written and share with the group. Or they can share artistic expression or even dancing expression. So I think one of my personal strategies is allowing them to show what they know and do in various ways and I'm there to enjoy it and learn from them.

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

Pam Mills: I organize my class in groups, not in rows, and I think that works best because it does allow me, as one of my strategies, to circulate the room and I think this enhances their learning. The way that I get my students to learn best in my room is to try to engage them with their interest and show the relativity through literature, as I teach English/ Language Arts in 8th Grade. Literature to me is a study of life and so if I can tap into that, and how a piece of literature relates to their personal lives, and through their writing they can express how it relates, that's how I grab them into learning; to make it relevant.

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

Pam Mills: I think the best way that I differentiate is through project orientation. I am a project-minded teacher and whenever I give a project that shows their learning, I always manage to give different ways that they can choose that they can show me that they have learned a piece of material content. To me, that's the best way to differentiate because they can choose whatever they feel comfortable and challenging. Of course, I do always assign a few that I think are necessary for learning the language arts.

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?

Pam Mills: The best way I know, other than tests and that sort of thing, is their eye contact. Their ability to shake their heads at me or smile... Whenever I don't see that response and I sense that they're not understanding something, I use that "Press Pause" and we'll go back and regroup, re-think and re-learn. Then we'll move forward. I use "Press Pause" a lot in the classroom.

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

Pam Mills: Showing the relevance of what we're studying. Literature, as a study of life, is the best hook I know. Giving them pieces of literature that I know they can relate to and know they understand; not only my literature, but also their literature... the things they write and the songs they listen to. This past week, we were listening to lyrics and I had them share the lyrics from their favorite songs. Apart from the music, I finally listened to the lyrics and their lyrics are so meaningful. I think relating my life to their life and their life to my life is the best way to hook them. It's all relevant.

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

Pam Mills: Obviously, teaching to me is a calling. I believe it's the highest calling that a person can have. I'm not being prejudiced, because that calling allows us to come in contact with so many young people who are impressionable. That responsibility is to be taken seriously. That's one thing that I would want new teachers and prospective teachers to consider; teaching is a very special calling. I would also remind them that, in the words of a well-known children's author, that if you feel the need to laminate, then teaching is for you. That was Corman that made that comment, and I truly believe that. If you look at laminating, that's protecting and preserving and that is the role of a teacher; to protect and preserve not only the young people that we come in contact with, but their futures. So, if you feel the need to laminate, then teaching is for you.