

## What the Best NC Teachers Do – Transcript

Teacher: Thomas McGeachy

**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?**

**Thomas McGeachy:** If someone visited my classroom several times, what they would notice is that I take on more of the role of a facilitator. My classroom is set up to be student centered, so I want students to have an active role in what is taking place. I'm there to facilitate or guide them through instructions. Also, they would notice that I focus more on students being able to produce products to show mastery of whatever subject happens to be in my classroom. So, small group instruction is a big part. I'm a facilitator, students are taking an active role in what's going on. They're able to relate their learning to the real world, so they know that it is relevant. I'm there to ensure that rigor is there as well. Those are things that I think are universal to a lot of classrooms, one of the unique things that I do in my classroom is, when I have students evaluate current events, I use what is called the DIME analogy. The D stands for diplomatic, the I is for information, M is for military and E is for economic. If we are looking at, in recent events in Syria, I'm asking my students to take a look at what is going on in that particular country or wherever it is that we are looking in the world, and if they were sitting on the President of the United States' advisory council, what recommendations would they make along the lines of diplomacy... Who should be involved? If it's information, what means will they use to communicate the message they want to get out to the public? Do they want to use print media or social networking? If there's a military requirement, what level of force would they use and what branch would they recommend... And if it's economics, are they going to use economic sanctions? That way they are taking what they are learning and applying it to a real world situation. They are able to formulate and then present to a current event or real world situation.

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

**Thomas McGeachy:** I organize my class into learning centers based on the students' learning abilities. They are in small groups. They are using peer instruction, so I have some of my stronger performers with students who need a little assistance in a particular area. Sometimes, students are more receptive to learning when it is coming from a peer versus an adult and again, I'm there to facilitate the learning that is taking place. I also take into account their learning preferences. Some students are better able to express themselves through art or through doing skits to show they have mastery versus writing or oral presentations. I try to tie it into their learning preference to make sure they are actively involved and that it's actually geared toward their strength. That way, they are more actively involved in the learning that is taking place.

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

**Thomas McGeachy:** For student groups such as that, I look at the process and the product and I differentiate based on those. For my AIG students, my process for delivering instruction for them is going to be different from that of a student who has special needs. They will still get the same content, because, regardless of what type of group they are in, I want them to be able to achieve the same level of proficiency. It's just that the means with which I deliver that content is going to be different. Also, I'll modify the product. If a student has an accommodation, where they need to have extra time, then I will make sure they are afforded the extra time to complete the product I give them. At the end of the day, I want all of my students to feel like they are achieving with the rest of the class. I don't want anyone separated based on their abilities and feeling like they're not valued in my 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?**

**Thomas McGeachy:** I know when learning is occurring based on formative assessment which continues throughout the instructional period. All of those assessments don't have to be graded, they can be simply through observation. I use that data to drive my instruction. Based on those assessments, if I see that students are not fully understanding the concept, or an objective that I have to teach that day, then I'll go back and re-teach it but I will change the strategy. If in teaching or trying to convey the learning objective to them, a lecture did not work, then when I re-teach it, I'm not going to use lecture again. I'll fall back on their particular learning preference and deliver that instruction via that mode. That way I can engage them, and again assess and see if I can continue on. But the main thing is to use formative assessment to drive my instruction to make sure my students are progressing along the lines toward mastery of a particular objective.

**Question 5 – How do you “hook” a reluctant learner to your content?**

**Thomas McGeachy:** I think the key to hooking a reluctant learner is to provide the relevancy of what it is that you are trying to teach them. Students today, and rightfully so, need to understand the application of what it is that they are learning to the real world. That's going to make them college and career ready. When you have a particular block of instruction, as I mentioned in my DIME analogy, I tied it into how it could be used in a job. You have to be able to formulate an opinion and then present that in a way that is convincing. Tie the relevancy in and I think that will hook your reluctant learner. Also, take into account their particular learning preferences. Not every student learns via audio instruction. Some need to have hands on instruction. They are kinesthetic learners. So, be flexible and allow for those different opportunities for learning to occur within the classroom and I think that will hook your reluctant learners.

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

**Thomas McGeachy:** One learning would be to develop a support system and include in that support system a teacher who has been teaching in the system for 5 or more years. We've all had our first day experiences, we've all had our mid-semester experiences... Don't be afraid to approach a teacher and ask questions. That's not a sign of weakness. That's a sign of genuinely caring about your profession and, more importantly, about your students. The other thing I would say is to invest a lot of time developing a rapport with your students before you try to deliver instruction to them. That rapport serves as a springboard to those students' learning. Once you establish that, it's a lot easier to convey or deliver instruction to them and they'll be more receptive to your instruction. Although it may seem counter-intuitive to a brand new teacher coming in, why should I spend two or three days doing leadership types of activities with my students, it's going to pay off big dividends down the road because that rapport is going to serve as a springboard for the delivery of instruction. I think the third thing that I would share with them is to be flexible in your lesson plans. You will develop lesson plans, but there will be times in the course of the instructional period where a learning opportunity may present itself. Don't be afraid to step away from the lesson plan briefly to address whatever concern a student may have. He or she may not normally be one who talks, but if something sparks an interest and it's off topic, it's ok. Spend a few minutes on that and let them express themselves and get back on topic. Or, if a student brings up a situation that applies to your particular lesson that you didn't consider, it's ok. Allow that to occur. Because it's all about the students and it should be centered on their learning, not necessarily what that lesson plan is. So be flexible because things do change based on experiences that our students have outside of the classroom before they come to us.