

Teacher Interview: Rhonda Holmes

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?

Alright, the unique teaching strategy that I always favor is something hands-on and visually appealing. We're always creating something in the art classroom; therefore, I always like to demonstrate and to show the students how to do things. They may also say it's a little chaotic because we have several middle school students that get excited when that light bulb comes off in their head and they say, "Oh, I see how you're supposed to do that!" to get the end product, so I think the two adjectives that would describe my classroom is not only "hands-on," but also...well..."productive chaos."

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

I organize my classroom in order for my students to become more productive and to be better learners by making sure they have different ways to access the information, knowing about all the options that are out there. Not only do we do our assignments in the classroom, and they have...they're linked to the objectives, which are on the board, to make it become real to them, I let them know they have options as far as how they can go about continuing their learning outside the classroom, so I post things on our class Weebly where they can get a list of resources in order to continue learning about the topics and the artists that we study. We also do a lot of Web 2.0 programs and cell phone programs that work on their cell phones so that they can continue learning on their own as well. So not only just in the classroom but to extend it beyond the classroom to their home or other places where they might be able to use their technology devices to continue their learning.

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

To differentiate, we do a lot of different one-on-one activities to meet them at their needs, but I have one class in particular where an inclusion class comes to my art class eighth grade first block, and so we come up with art assignments that are linked to the ones that the regular education students are using; however it may be where we have to do one-on-one with the special education teacher or the special education TA to make sure that student builds those motor skills with drawing, understands the connection between the different color schemes that we're doing and working with, and just over all, just trying to make sure that not only do we go to their level, but we try to push them up to the letter...the level that is best for them, just to move them a step further in their learning and also in their physical ability.

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 feel like learning is taking place in my classroom when I see the students talking to each other; I hear them...I hear them explaining topics to them, "Well, that's how you do it. This...I did it that way one time and it was wrong, so this is how...I'm a show you how to do it." When I see them actually sharing with others something that they learned, and that we have demonstrated and worked on in the classroom, I know that learning has taken place. We also do pre- and post-assessments in the art classroom, so we might do a drawing test at the beginning of the lesson and then we'll do the same drawing test at the end to show...to compare what the student has started off with knowing and what they have learned at the end of the process.

When learning is not taking place, I will say that I have to come up with a creative way to address it, so by coming up with a different way to teach the lesson or I even go out and ask other teachers like, "What do you do in order to get this topic across?" So just definitely going out and looking for creative ways to ensure that if the learning didn't take place on one day, the next day I can go back in the classroom revved up, ready to teach it a different way.

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

Reluctant learners...I usually try to redirect them to try the assignment; however, I do still have learners who do not turn in anything. I'm sorry and embarrassed to admit that on tape, but that's what it is and what we do is just to add to the community of the school, I allow them to choose something within the classroom that helps our classroom continue to prepare forward to do, so it might not be linked directly to the curriculum, but to have that student to be an active part of the community of the class by maybe assisting with passing out things or keeping track of student work; those things, hopefully, by the next period or the next day that they come back that they will make a change within themselves to stay motivated to be in my classroom and actually just turn in some work, so it might be here, there and everywhere, but I definitely try to work with our non-motivated students.

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

New teachers in North Carolina, my advice is to hang in there. It is not all bad as you think it is. You might have some awful days, but to...to just remember that all the teachers that are three years and above that are continuing education, they had bad days as well, so we need you to keep the force and continue to stay motivated to be in the classroom. The next thing I would tell them is that look at your successes, look at the small things that you have done correct today or that week and then build upon those successes. Those are the things that will drive you and keep you going. And the last thing I would tell them is that we're in this together. We're trying to move North Carolina to the next level. We can't do it without some new blood, so we want to make sure they are welcomed into the North Carolina education profession and that they know that we're in this together, so those are the three things I would say to them.