

Teacher Interview: Jami Dickerson

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?

Okay...somebody would definitely say, I think, firstly, the relationships are what they would notice first in my classroom. We have a sense of family or community in our classroom and that is the foundation for everything else that we do, so through relationships, I have a lot of whole-brain teaching going on, a lot of rigor and a lot of relevancy, which is driving all my instruction, building good classroom management, high time on task, high engagement, and overall good test scores and happy kids.

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

Well, I think it is important to model good organization for the kids. I think it's something really important to teach your kids how to be organized, how to be on task, and so I have a very bright, engaging classroom to keep the kids interested, and also teach them good tips on staying organized as well, having good schedules, keeping us time on task is high and effective, and just keeping them engaged throughout the day helps our organization, and making sure we stay on the same schedule for kids, which usually helps along the day.

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

I am a person that loves whole-brain teaching, and so what is so great about whole-brain teaching is that it gets all parts of your mind working, which works for kids that are EC and it works for kids that are higher and works for all types of kids, so that way I know with that teaching style, I'm reaching all learners all throughout the day, no matter where their ability level is.

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 know learning is occurring by looking at student engagement, seeing if kids are with me. I know through quick formative assessments, summative assessments. I usually know through classroom management if...I know that if we're having a rough day that day, that's usually because kids are not understanding and so they're taking their energy elsewhere. If I do see that that's happening, then I just need to reflect on what I'm doing, and what can I change to make our day, make our week go better and more smoothly so that I know their learning and our time on task and engagement is up.

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

You have to love what kids love, so once again, you have to build that relationship with them. They have to trust you. They have to feel safe in a nurturing environment. Then you gotta figure out what they

love, and as a teacher it should be our job to change ourselves for them, to teach what is gonna make them happy, what is gonna engage them so that they'll wanna learn, and then you just build on that each day that they come to you, and once I think you learn that if you're teaching is for them, their gonna be happy, you're gonna be happier and it's just a cycle that works so well.

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

Number one, our job is immeasurable. There's nothing better; there's nothing greater, and it will be a bumpy road, but the feeling that you'll get almost every day is...it can't be measured; it can't be expressed. It's great. Keep going; just keep swimming. You'll get through it, and, you know, to keep your head up and don't let others' point of view change how you feel about teaching because it really is the profession that leads to all other professions, and it's the best job that you can have.