

Teacher Interview: Elizabeth Padgett

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?

Oh, they would see several different instructional strategies. The kids come into my classroom never knowing what strategy's gonna be laid upon them. There's a lot of collaboration. I teach sixth grade science, so the students are set up in lab groups, so there's a lot of group learning going on; there's pair learning going on. So many different activities that reach every single student within that group.

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

I think you help them become better learners by getting to know them as a student because even though you've got a group of kids sitting in front of you, you're teaching your group of children, but you're also teaching individual students. So to help them become better learners, you have to know where they are and where they need to be, or where they would like to go. Maximizing students...I think that classroom is basically their classroom. They're the leaders in that classroom. They take care of everything; they know where everything is and they know exactly what to do.

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

Again, I think that you have to get to know the students, get to know their background, their family situation, and sit down and talk with them and find out, you know, how do they like to learn? Do they want to listen to the story? Do they want to have someone read it to them? Do they want to see it in print? Do they want to look it up on the internet or have a book to hold? Any of those. You really have to get to know your students.

How do you know when learning is occurring and what do you do when you question whether learning is taking place in the classroom?

Learning is occurring when they are so actively engaged and communicating with one another and wanting to come to the classroom and noticing when that light bulb goes off and they say, "Oh yeah!" That's when you know learning is going on.

When learning is not taking place, you have to kind of step back and kind of evaluate what's going on, and what you as a teacher can do better to meet the needs of the kids.

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

You know what? I always build a relationship with that student. You know, they wanna learn, and they wanna make you proud of them, and if they know you care about them, they're not gonna be reluctant to learn. They're gonna want to learn.

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

Get to know your students. Get to know their backgrounds. Be patient. Do what's best for your students, not what's going on in another classroom. I don't know, I have to think about this...get to know your students; do it your way; be patient; learn through trial and error; keep what's working; get rid of what's not; be flexible; be willing to change; listen to older teachers who have been there and done that and take away from that what you feel you can take back to your own classroom.