

Teacher Interview: Keana Triplett

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?

Some principle instructional strategies that I use in my classroom...if you walk in on a daily basis you're going to see that we read nonstop. We have sustained silent reading in the classroom and I teach the difference in academic reading and leisure reading and how important both of them are, and I try to facilitate a love of reading in my students. So often when they get to high school, they don't like to read anymore, and that's a foundational thing for any student, but especially for the English student that you have to understand why you're reading what you're reading, whether it's for your own enjoyment or it's for the academic realm. And then, also, I meet my students where they are, so that universal need that they have when they walk in the door. Some of them, it's they haven't eaten. Some of them it's that maybe mom and dad were yelling at them before they came to school that morning and they had a falling out, and I have to meet those needs before I can ever meet the needs of my students, so every day I have conversations and they vary about what's going on at home and how that actually palsy in to what we are doing in the classroom.

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

Classroom organization is very important to me. I'm very rigorous in what I have my students do and we collaborate every day all the time, so I don't have the classic structure of desks in a row in my classroom. They're actually in groups, so we do group collaboration daily and we do group projects and things of that nature, so students find where their strengths are and we play to those. We do things called literature circles where they each have a different role every night that they fulfill, and they find where their niche is, and that help them to excel and meets them with head on what they need.

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

I differentiate my instruction a lot, but I do it for everyone. There are things, for example, when we write an essay that tends to be hard for students who have special needs, so I do things like sentence starters. I use a lot of the WIDA Standards for my ESL students, and that has revolutionized my classroom. Taking something that has been difficult for them in a text and just giving them a painting and having them to interpret some themes from the painting. Give some examples of color and how that's symbolic in the painting really helps all of my students, not just my exceptional needs students to be able to further their own academic thinking, and so when I differentiate, I do it for all my students, and that has helped my teaching and my students even more.

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 when learning is occurring in my classroom when my students are smiling and when they are actively engaged in conversations with each other about what we're doing. When I hear, "Oh! But I don't think that!" "No, I disagree with you." Or "I think this is great! This is phenomenal!" Or things like, "I really don't like this. It's not what I would choose." I know learning is happening because they're talking about it. And when learning is not happening, when they are being quiet, I reflect on my own practice and figure out what I'm doing wrong, what I need to do to help them do better, because after all, I'm the difference. I'm the determining factor in whether learning is taking place or not. It's all in how I present things and it's all in how I have them to think about things.

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

Hooking reluctant learners can be difficult, especially at the high school level, but I have learned that the first thing I have to do on day one is get to know them, so it doesn't matter whether I've heard through the grapevine that they're a reluctant learner or not, I find out for myself, and I get to know them, and who they are and what makes them tick. I see what their interests are and I play to those, so a lot of our activities that we do will be tailored to those reluctant learners and will be focused on things that they have outside of the classroom.

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

I would have lots of advice for a new teacher, but the one thing I would tell them is that you don't have to be perfect; it's not going to be perfect. I remember as a beginning teacher myself I wanted all my lessons to be perfect and I wanted my students to soak them up like sponges, but it's not going to happen, and that's part of our professional practice is that we are reflective and we see what works and what doesn't and we learn from it because we are lifelong learners as teachers, and so that's what I would tell them. Be ready to go back and reboot what you've done and don't be afraid of change. Change is a good thing a lot of times, and your students can teach you as much as you can teach them.