

Mon, 17 Aug 2009

12:10 AM

First things first

Coach Cavin suggested that I keep a journal so that he can stay updated on my new job. What a great idea! Often, I am making random notes on stickies and notepads with no way to organize those thoughts later. Now I have a place for reflection.

School begins one week from tomorrow. I have been on a school faculty retreat in Dallas and I have seen my classroom once. There is a lot of construction going on in the building so I plan to be there a great deal this week to get set up. Also, this week I will be working on my syllabus, rules, consequences, classroom procedures and my lesson plans with my team. I have many of these things scattered around in binders, word documents and presentations. I also would like to request my students' cum records and write a letter to send to the parents with my class procedures. My goal this week is to get these ducks in a row.

The retreat allowed me to get to know my department and participate in some team building. I promised my team that I would reach out to them when I needed help. Let's see how they respond!

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Day One - Part A - Data and ELL

Meetings, working lunches, and guest speakers. "What is said here, stays here. What is learned here, leaves here."

A huge concern for our school according to the testing statistics: African-American males.

Suggestions/Interventions: male mentor programs (with effective mentor training), encouragement for extracurricular activities, male-lead organization/ Bulletin 100 class "Reconnecting Youth" requires a minimum GPA (unfortunately), seat these students in the "T-section" of the classroom where teachers tend to focus, male-based assemblies, maintain high expectations (pull them aside and ask them to be leaders), survey these students and gauge their needs, and start a committee to plan these events.

English Language Learners:

CHALLENGES:

curriculum/textbook and the language/vocabulary, reading and writing assignments, getting from lower levels of thinking to the higher-order levels of learning, SES differences.

STRATEGIES:

multiple approaches to cognitive processes: BICS- "above surface" -pronunciation, grammar, vocab. CALPS- "below surface"-semantic and functional meaning. Above all be explicit and systematic. Focus on a few key words, use visual aids, real objects, work in groups (think/pair/share), use english/spanish cognates, word wall, deprocess a few days later, cooperative learning groups, modeling

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Day One - Part B - Schema Poster

Approaching these students with high expectations of a high level of rigor is imperative. To accomplish this intrinsically, I will have a daily schema activator. This will be organized onto a laminated poster for daily quick reference and as a way to plan, guide and deliver my instruction. It will relate the new information to a real world application and/or the students' prior knowledge. I want them to have a vested interest in the material rather than just a surface knowledge to answer simple questions. They will need to know, understand and DO each day. The poster will explicitly state the "activator" (to be completed in the first 5 minutes), the "BIG idea" or learning objective, and what they will know, do, and be throughout the lesson.

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Mon, 24 Aug 2009

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Day One w/ Students

Day one was a smooth day, overall! Last minute forms for homeroom were easily worked into my plan and I followed the campus gameplan for handing out student schedules and the numerous forms for students and parents to fill-out, sign, and return.

I planned to introduce myself, the classroom surroundings, and the subject matter of Physics. But more importantly, I explained that in order to learn about physics, we have to set some rules, guidelines, and procedures. I then began to go over my syllabus which stated the course description as described in the student handbook, required materials, grading policy, rules, consequences, rewards, and procedures. Once the norms were established, I was able to have the students complete a student information sheet to think/pair/share as a team-building activity. I asked questions on the info sheet that would allow me to get to know them and what their expectations are of the class. Because of the adjusted lengths of classes, some of the classes were not able to get all of the way through the activity. I will still look over their answers and give feedback.

I had an inclusion teacher join me for periods 1 and 2. So I had homeroom first and 3rd period on my own. I have a great deal of respect for Ms. Fry, as do the students. Consequently, this is a good match and I am pleased to be working with her.

The students had dresscode issues, but very little behavior issues on the first day. They all displayed respect and used appropriate language in my classroom. My second period is the largest and seems to have some negative leaders that the rest feed from. My 3rd period class is still big but has some very positive leaders and I can already tell that they are working well in a partner setting. Fourth period was my planning period and I was able to sit with my department chair, the inclusion teacher and the other physics instructor to verbally make a rough plan for the next two weeks lessons. Already, after reflecting on the planning session, I recognize that I need to lay out clear expectations even for my colleagues if I want certain results from planning meetings. I have tweaked the plan to my style and my preferred sequence without messing up the district curriculum frameworks. I will have two formats of lesson plans to complete (one for my department chair and one for my intern program). The lesson plan cycle for my intern program requires me to be very specific, even down to the questions I ask in class discussion.

Prior to this morning I had prepared a seating chart that is coded for grouping students into 2's, 3's, and 4's without them ever being with the same people. I also assigned them student numbers to help me "alphabetize" with ease and easily note missing assignments. My rules, consequences, and procedures were all posted as well as a schema

activator poster next to my word wall, parking lot, and cornell note model. The schema activator poster is a campus wide poster that is used to state a daily objective, how it attaches to a student's schema (prior knowledge or real world application), and what they need to "know, do and be" from this objective. This is the information that they will be looking for during walk-throughs and observations.

However, I do not want to lose sight of getting to know my learners. I want them to take charge of their learning...but in my way, with my procedures. Does that make sense? Will I lose some of the natural insight I have with kids? I have to remind my self that I am not restricting their personalities, just their behavior.

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Sun, 30 Aug 2009

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Week 1

<p>My first week ran very smooth and I feel like my students are responding well to my procedures. There are several students movin in and out of my classes and so I do not feel like I can begin handing out materials such as journals until my class lists settle a bit more. I have begun my lessons on safety and feel frustrated that the material is too dry. </p>

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Fri, 4 Sep 2009

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End of week 2

<p>This week I allowed the students to set up their journals and we began our unit on scientific method. I had the students design a lab using a pendulum to spice up the unit. The curriculum frameworks had an activity that seemed more appropriate for a chemistry class so I tweaked it to something that was more in line with physics concepts. I had them work in groups, complete a lab worksheet and represent their results on posters to the class. This seemed to keep thme engaged in the material and I feel confident that they are truly learning how the method is implemented in the real world of science.</p>

<p>Lesson plans continue to be something that I struggle with. Actually, I feel that I do not have enough time to complete them and all of the administrative duties that are required from both the internship and my campus.</p>

<p>A learning walk was completed on my class this week by my department chair and the curriculum specialist. They told me that they liked what they saw, that the students ALL seemed engaged and that the things they were looking for were all present in my classroom. (word wall, schema activator, student work displayed, etc)</p>

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Sun, 20 Sep 2009

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After 4th Week

It has now been four weeks and I am still loving my job! I have had an emotional week but now feel more of a vested interest in my kids.

Last Saturday I volunteered for Project Prevail to Graduation walk. We walked through the neighborhoods and knocked on the doors of those students that had not shown up to school yet to try to get them to come and register for classes. It was difficult to see the abandoned houses, trailer parks, and poorly maintained homes. I felt an attachment to my students just walking up to the houses and making contact with the community. I know that these kids are coming to school with some real issues and I now have a better understanding of what life is like for them before they see me in the morning and what they go home to at night. The project was a success if only for the fact that the community members are able to see that we care about the kids in the community and want them in school.

This week there was a fight after school in my hallway. At about 5pm I could hear a girl crying hysterically and people yelling. I got goosebumps as I peaked outside of my room. A girl was hunched over crying so hard that her face seemed to be distorted and I could barely make out her words, "Leave me alone! I hate you! You don't love me! I am not going anywhere with you!" She was holding on to a doorknob a few doors down and was being pulled at the waist by another girl that had a crazed look on her face (eyes glazed over and bugged out). At first glance, I thought that both of these girls were ones with special needs based on their behavior. I thought, "Where is the special ed teacher?" Before I knew it, they were hitting each other and the thuds of them falling on the ground boomed in my chest. I walked closer to them and even though I was scared, I was going to try to break it up. Luckily, our assistant principal was running toward and calling out one of the girls' names. The girl whom had been crying finally broke away, ran down the hall and out the main entrance to the school. The other took a moment to get her bearings and then started to run after her. She stumbled and fell on her face before running out to follow. Apparently, this was the girls' mother! Looking no older than the crying teenager, the intoxicated mother had come up to the school and was beating her child in public! I knew that these kids were going to have issues...I mean, they are teenagers. But I think this was an eye-opening experience that made my heart sink. Now I know I am where I am supposed to be... at a place where I can do the most good...making a positive impact in their lives is what makes my job rewarding. We, as teachers, may be the only encouraging and stable people that they see, the only smile they get, and the only encouragement that their lives are worth something.

Thursday night was open house and there were a measly 75 chairs set up in the cafeteria for a PTA meeting to kick off the night. Other teachers had told me that I might have 1 or 2 students that bring their parents to meet me...5 at the most. To my surprise and that of my fellow teachers, I had ten students bring their parents to meet me! More than double any other teacher in the school! It was a historical night for our principal. He had never had that many parents come to an open house. 175 parents showed to greet the teachers!

I read a newspaper article yesterday from the Star-Telegram about a report that had been put out by the Children at Risk non-profit organization. The report compared graduation rates, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and passing rates on college entrance exams amongst 902 high schools in the state and 156 schools in North Texas. Immediately, I looked toward the bottom for my school, and sure enough it was second from the bottom. I am so proud to say that I work there and I have gotten used to the initial reactions of people when I tell them which high school I work at. I know that each time my kids show up to school and become engaged in learning that they are beating the odds. All I have to do is create that environment.

Friday was a waiver day and we had a speaker come to our school to talk about the "Fish philosophy." #1 Play. #2 Be there. #3 Choose your attitude. #4 Make their day.

Saturday I had PDAS training.

Oops, entry too long! But it was a long week!

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