

Teacher Interview Notes

Teacher: Beth Espinoza

Date: December 5th, 2011

Time: 2:45 pm

Location: Beth Espinoza's Classroom at Thomas Jefferson Carter School

1. I have observed that in your classroom, you have the desks arranged in groups of three and that you use group work frequently in the lessons? Why do you use this arrangement and teaching method?

- Always done it in groups
- I have done in the groups of three, and in the double horseshoe way – full class is group
 - depends on students which arrangement used
- Cannot do rows
 - cemetery rows – everyone is dead, everyone in their place, everyone has a tombstone and they are all lined up
 - no interaction
 - students feel isolated, on the spot when called on.

2. How do you decide how you are going to introduce a new lesson? The book sets it up at an investigation; do you mostly just follow the book?

- Start with the book
- Use previous experience from past years
 - look at the subject,
 - think about background skill needed,
 - what questions are going to come up
 - what traditionally students have had trouble with
 - curriculum included a lot of this but I draw from my own experience
 - give a review of what obstacle previous classes have encountered

3. How do you teach the body of your lesson?

- Use the investigations in the book and have students work in groups
- I'll have a class discussion

- If off task behavior
 - usually because they are lost
- if everyone hands are going up
 - more effective to address the class if multiple groups have the same question
- Monitor how working as group
 - change instruction
 - if don't want to work – ill drag you through it then

4. **How do you deal with the situation of the whole group comes in with the mindset of I don't want to do anything today? Or the student who just sits there and says, "I don't care," how do you deal with that?**

- The school [Thomas Jefferson Charter School], due to parent support, majority of the students have come up through the school are in alignment with philosophy of the school – you behave yourself and your responsible for behavior (atmosphere of school)
 - atmosphere of school helps
 - peer pressure is more to be on task then to off task - huge
 - elementary is very ridge
- Get students who come midway through their school experience that are not used to the atmosphere of the school
 - they want to be class clown
 - other kids don't respond to them
- Personally, in the past at other schools
 - deal with it with a sense of humor
 - use proximity
 - tease the student a little bit
 - if persists, say "I'm trying to be patient with you, but this is getting..." and just go from there
 - real issues: isolation
 - in big schools: send to the hall – students hated it
 - at TJCS policy: send to another classroom
 - arrangements with 8th grade classroom
 - send students there and have to sit on the floor and do their work – students embarrassed

5. Do you feel that the atmosphere of the school also related to motivation?

- Students have really good work ethic from philosophy of school
- looking at having a grade on the report card that is for motivation/work ethic
- In elementary – student of the month/week award for responsible behavior
- HS level didn't work – almost a negative
 - outgrown
- Seniors get extended lunch as a reward
 - not much impact

6. What do you expect from your students?

- #1 expectation: trying to understand and engaging
 - curious if everyone got A's on the test: happy or just too easy
 - understand what they are doing and improve
 - must be active
- call on students randomly – a lot
 - don't raise their hands anymore
 - ask a lot of questions
 - when I question, I'm asking everybody, I want everyone to have time to think about it and then call on somebody
 - vary in who call on, sometimes call on people because
 - looks like not paying attention and want to engage again
 - looks like they have a question
 - looks like they know the answer
 - don't feel punished because varies and it is an expectation that at any point could be called on

7. How did you learn to use the questioning method you use?

- It is hard, do not think of them ahead of time
- mentor told me: always be curious
 - honestly curious about what the students are thinking
 - how did you get that answer?
 - what were you thinking to get that?
 - what was the process
 - honestly curious, the questions will come

- use this mindset
- have to be comfortable with thinking on your feet
- have to make things explicit in teaching, things that are automatic have to become explicit
- until you can be comfortable with this, write questions ahead of time
 - problem with teaching through inquiry:
 - never know what path is going to be
- you have to know what your target is and have to know if where they [the students] are going is going to take you to your target
 - deep content knowledge

8. So do you have to curve your questions so that students go where your target is?

- Sometimes I'll push it back to target
- If not, I will say, "so this is not going where and want it and we are going to come back to it another time"
- Often, go exactly where you want it to go
- Best part – came from students
 - ready to learn it because it came from them – powerful
 - sometimes students come up with something you have never thought of
 - write down the epiphany

9. Do you feel like the teaching approach of having students come up with the wanted outcome on their own, produces a mindset of guessing is ok to do to reach the final product?

- the learning become explicit – happens everywhere
 - my approach has the process be oral
 - other approach, shuts down the internal thinking process that is never known by the teacher unless oral
 - When oral, students are verbally describing what they are thinking and they know it is alright to throw out suggestions

10. Do you feel like the classroom has different levels of learning? High achieving vs low achieving? How do you deal with these different brackets of learning?

- balancing act but better
- integrated curriculum allows for differentiation
 - environment allows for low achieving students to high achieve
- challenge

- low achieving students holding up high achieving students
- inquiry environment allows for
 - everybody has something to contribute
 - someone who has a hard time coming up with ideas – write things down
 - others brainstorming
 - as long as engaged
 - part of group work
- target is import here
 - decide what is minimum accepted level – everyone get to this level
 - others can go further

11. Do you assess the high achieving students and low achieving students at the same rate?

- assess the same – decision you have to make as a teacher
- Adapt for low achieving
 - change format, if don't do well on standard class assessment
 - go over with it orally because students
 - don't know what the question is asking
 - don't know how to express what they are thinking
 - gives a way to show this
 - I have to resolve that they get it before they can pass it
 - professional standard: they really do have a minimum understanding
 - don't just redo test, or correct the answers students got wrong
 - don't really know how it was corrected
 - if now understand material
 - give another test
 - if whole group situation
 - give a retake to class
 - option to retake quiz
 - mark first test only right or wrong, no comments
- have to have an internal standard in your mind that you are not willing to bend and you have to draw the line there
 - there is a point that they have to know it

12. Do you use assessments as a closing, wrap up activity for a lesson?

- Pretty much
- There are projects I would like to use, but never been able to because of time
 - my own time planning and scheduling it in

13. Do you feel rushed to have to complete all the criteria for the amount of material you are supposed to get through? How do you deal with that

- yes rushed
 - have to let go of some things
- stressed first couple of year
 - overwhelming
 - block schedule helped
 - more prep time
 - 90 minute prep everyday helps
 - 6 days a week I work to plan for material of class