

Reading, Writing, and the Inclusive Classroom

Future Learning Goals Essay

It's hard for me to imagine what the next stage in my career will look like, but I'm certain that I will continue building upon the work I have done already as an educator. I'd like to think that I will continually push myself to find new and innovative ways to reach students, while simultaneously reflecting on my past practices: what worked and what didn't, to develop my skills further. As with most teachers, of course, I worry about becoming stagnant; I worry about relying too heavily on methods that have been time-tested and have proven reliable in the past. In order to make sure this doesn't happen for me, I have some ideas in mind to help hold myself accountable to the task of constantly improving. First, as a language arts teacher, I would like to learn more about independent reading in the classroom and how to integrate activities that allow students to become self-motivated and lifelong readers. Second, I would like to transform my writing instruction and shift closer to the model known as writer's workshop. Finally, as a general educator, I would simply like to be more cognizant of the general learning needs and desires of my students with the ultimate goal of developing teaching practices that are inclusive to all groups, and not simply targeted to top-tier students.

Implementing Independent Reading

The idea of integrating independent reading in the classroom piqued my curiosity for the first time a year ago when I attended a conference on classroom reading hosted by Penny Kittle, a self-proclaimed "teacher, author, and advocate" for developing independent reading in the classroom. Her presentation with equal parts informational and inspirational. First, I learned that there was a correlation between student success on testing and increased reading fluency, the kind of reading fluency that can only be developed through encouraging lifelong readers. Second, I learned that it was indeed possible to make students see reading not as a chore or task, but as a pleasurable activity. Kittle's presentation included several testimonies from her own students that described how they had all learned to love reading. I left that conference feeling elated...yet I have yet to develop a concrete plan for how to integrate independent reading in my classroom. However, I hope that by starting a program like this I will have the ability to influence other teachers to do the same.

Exploring Writer's Workshop

I find the teaching of writing to be one of the most challenging aspects of being an English teacher. It's challenging mostly because giving accurate feedback and tailoring instruction to meet the needs of 30+ individual students can be a daunting task. Every year, I tweak my instruction to try and accomplish these goals, but I always feel like I could be doing more. At some points, I have wondered if the approach I use of full-class instruction followed by individual work time with conferencing is the best approach. Thus, I find myself curious about implementing a writer's workshop model (or at least elements of it). The writer's workshop model encourages students to work at their own

pace, giving the teacher the freedom to meet the needs of each student on a more personal, individualized level.

Developing an Inclusive Classroom

I think most every teacher strives to create a positive classroom environment that fosters inclusivity and acceptance of all students, but the methods we use to get to that point are all a little different. It's something I'm certainly mindful of, but, like writing instruction, often feel that I am limited to growing and building upon based on the volume of students I see on a daily basis. It can be challenging to get to know the learning styles and basic needs of each student, but it's something I hope to keep on working at. Enter Sharon Draper's *Out of My Mind*, a book I read for one of my classes this summer that opened my eyes to the various needs of all students. The book was thoughtful, poignant, heartbreaking, hilarious, and uplifting all at once. More than that, I got me thinking that perhaps the best way to get to know students better is to find a book like this one, share it with students, and then create a dialogue about inclusivity in the classroom and how we can work together to achieve that goal.

As such, although my work in this program is drawing to a close, this need not be the end of my development as an educator and a lifelong learner. Good teachers recognize their strengths and, more importantly, see their weaknesses as opportunities to grow. By delving into the aforementioned topics, I hope to develop my skills as a teacher in the coming years.