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Internship Reflection: Fall Semester 2017

Through teaching at Caldwell High School this past semester, I have been given the opportunity to test various theories and strategies within the classroom. While I knew I wouldn't be an expert as soon as I walked through the doors, I was still surprised by the intense learning curve there was for new teachers. While my internship only lasted a few months, it taught me a many lessons that I will use throughout my teaching career. This past semester has taught me to not take things personally, make students accountable for their work, keep things simple, listen to everything, and to connect to student's lives. Although I was the one teaching the class, I felt that I learned just as much from the students as I had taught them.

The first lesson the internship taught me was not to take things personally. I began the semester wanting to adapt the classroom around the strategy of cooperative learning, only to learn later on that the students may not have been able to handle the responsibility. The entire point of Cooperative Learning is to allow students face-to-face interactions, individual (and group) accountability, and the ability to process information as a group. All of these skills have the potential to help students understand information with the help of their peers. Since not every person thinks about things in the same way, each member of these student groups would have their own unique insight about the information presented to them. Cooperative learning also allows the opportunity for

students to build confidence and motivate them to work together. Unfortunately, none of the classes I taught were able to handle the cooperative learning structure. I believe the problem was not with the strategy but with the students having too much freedom without proper management skills.

I had originally felt it was my fault that the students couldn't figure out the cooperative learning strategy. I thought that maybe I had explained the instructions incorrectly or maybe the groups had been too large. Ultimately I realized that sometimes things just wouldn't work out. After coming to this conclusion I began to adapt my classroom differently and everything corrected itself. In the future I will try to take failures less personally in the classroom so that I may adjust my plans more easily.

The second lesson I learned was to make students accountable for their work. During my first few weeks of the internship, I found myself giving students extensions on all of their assignments and allowing themselves to waste time in class. I now realize just how important time is in the classroom. While I was fortunate enough to have a computer and Internet at home, there are some students who lack that same privilege. Due to this, the time in class becomes even more valuable since the school offers computers and Internet to students in the building. Although I cannot control what devices or opportunities students are given at home, I can at least make sure they learn to manage their time within my classroom in the future. I began learning tricks to keep students on task towards the end of the semester such as assigning daily goals and drafts for assignments and papers.

In order to keep the seniors accountable for their actions, I have decided a different approach is necessary. The problem Mrs. Akkerman and I had with the senior

class is that they wouldn't show up to class. We don't believe it was because they didn't like us but instead that they just didn't see attendance as important. Through many events of trial and error I have concluded that seniors must be graded based on their attendance in the classroom. In order to ensure that they show up to class we had to motivate them with daily in-class assignments and projects that way they must be present for a grade. While they may think school is boring, I guarantee they will want to make sure they don't come back for another year.

The next lesson I learned throughout the semester was to simplify things. Although this may get confused with lowering the difficulty, I don't mean that at all. What I mean by simplifying things is to literally make things easier for students to understand. I noticed that students would sometimes give up if they had to struggle through something long enough, so why not just make things easier for them so that they may accomplish the tasks given. I don't want my future students to struggle without purpose when I can simply make the instructions easier for them to understand. Our society has been built on making things easier through texting, applications on the phone, and even the Internet in general. Due to the simplicity in society, our students are being raised with the mentality that things should come easy, and while I do not support this way of thinking, I do think that we need to adapt as teachers to fit society.

Although I may be close to the same age as my students, I do still feel lost in their culture at times. The next lesson I took away from this internship was to listen to the students. In order to connect with the students you teach, it is important to understand what they are interested in so that you may connect information to them directly. For instance, say there are some students in the class who enjoy video games, in order to

connect the fictional writing assignment to these kids I may tell them to think of it like _____ video game. If I am able to understand what movies the students enjoy, I can link books to modern movies they may have seen, like William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Disney's *The Lion King*.

The final lesson this internship has taught me was to always try and connect what the student's are learning to their futures. I cannot tell you how many times a student will ask "why do I have to learn this" and in order for us to do our jobs, teachers should always have a legitimate response to these questions. If I am ever unable to tell a student why they are learning about *Hamlet* or *Enders Game* than why am I teaching them the book? Teachers are required to teach specific books throughout the year but we would be ridiculous to not understand why those books were chosen. In order to help every one of my future students, I will always be able to answer the ridiculous question of "why do I have to learn this" which I know will be heard every year.

Although I may never remember everything that went right throughout this internship at Caldwell High School, I know that I will never forget the various failures, and that isn't a bad thing. I am thankful for this internship because it has allowed me to grow as a teacher, a professional, and a mentor. Knowing that teaching is a constantly evolving profession gives fills me with excitement since it will give me the opportunity to try new methods and experiences throughout my career.

Works Cited

Knight, Jim. *High-Impact instruction a framework for great teaching*. Corwin Press, 2015.