



Celebrating New Opportunities

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Abstract: This article is a summary of the work I do as an instructor at the University of Southern Maine. I teach the Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages course and supervise student teachers in ETEP (Extended Teacher Education Program). As a retired classroom teacher, I hope others will find the article interesting and seek similar opportunities. We have many years of experience and study to share with future educators.

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Introduction

Teaching part-time at the post-secondary level is an opportunity open to retired teachers. It provides an enriching experience for both retired teachers and for new teachers-in-training. We all benefit from experience and the wisdom of those in the field. I feel very privileged to be an instructor and supervisor for the University of Southern Maine (USM). I teach the Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages course and supervise student teachers (called “interns”) of all disciplines and grade levels.

In the methods class, some students are enrolled because they are preparing to teach a language other than English, but others are already in the field and need the course to complete requirements for certification. My syllabus includes learning about the many methodologies we

have used in the past, comparing them, and using them to design and manage a communicative and student-centered classroom. We focus on ways to organize and teach, using current research, national standards, state standards, and classroom experience. The teaching and learning strategies we study and practice include the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with culture as the foundation for all of them. The overriding concerns of the interns are classroom management and the need to know many strategies to keep the class learning and motivated. I hope they gain the insight that a positive environment with meaningful expectations and well-prepared, well-executed, and meaningful lessons are the basis of all classroom management.

Besides strategies, students are seeking information for creating formative and summative assessments, using rubrics and standards-based assessments. We also look at textbooks and different models of cross-curricular involvement that open opportunities for extensions and give visibility and viability to second languages in the school system.

For the primary textbook, we use *Teacher Handbook* (4th edition) by Judith Scurm and Eileen Glisan as our common resource but also include Web sites and publications from professional organizations. Each student is required to read and share five reaction papers to professional readings and two learning strategies. We share these requirements in the class meetings. By the end of the semester, the students pull together what they have learned into a five-day lesson unit, including the four skills, culture, and technology. We all learn from one another and share insights throughout the semester.

Not to be simplistic nor to overgeneralize, but native and non-native interns face different challenges. The native speakers know and are very comfortable with the language and understand how difficult it is to learn a second language. However, they often have more

difficulty with class management because of their own experiences in the classroom, and they tend to be overly rigid in the classroom procedures. The non-native speakers do not have the innate understanding of the language but are familiar with the American students' behaviors and needs. They have better literacy skills, which helps with communication to the home. I try to help both the native and non-native interns bridge the gaps and feel positive about their strengths.

In addition to the methods class, one of the most interesting and enjoyable experiences I have is supervising interns. I work with the Extended Teacher Education Program (ETEP) of the University of Southern Maine (USM). This is an opportunity for me to guide future teachers, using my 44 years of classroom experience and recent research. It is very rewarding to work with interns from when they begin in a classroom in September with very little experience to seeing them finish in May, well-prepared as teachers who are ready to be in a classroom and become leaders in their fields.

My responsibilities include at least six visits to their classrooms, followed by conversations and written observations, as well as conferences with them and their mentor teachers as they prepare goals and overcome frustrations. I give positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. I also use a rubric to evaluate their video reflections and online discussions. Often, I can help them see beyond the immediate concerns that they face to the broader picture. What may seem like a total disaster in a class is really only a bump on the road. We all make mistakes but learn to move on and try new options the next time. They react positively to my suggestions and always give them a try.

Conclusion

For me, it is a privilege to continue to be involved in education. After 44 years of active classroom teaching, I still was not ready to quit "cold turkey" or retrain for a new field of

interest. Now, without all the responsibilities of planning lessons and the other responsibilities of teaching, I really enjoy being able to be of value and working with our future educators.

You all have so much experience and expertise that new teachers crave. Many will not have mentors in their fields because they are the only second language teachers in the building. I urge you, if you are interested, to contact your local university or community college to teach or tutor part-time. It keeps the brain cells alive!