

## Reflective Questionnaire

1) What is (or are the) social studies and why do/should we teach it/them?

The social sciences are likely the largest of all the disciplines – by nature, they are cross-curricular. Social studies is the study of human interactions, geographic impacts, cultural influences, the science of societal issues, the literature of humanity, art of public policy, and the mathematics to calculate these. Social studies connect all subjects and gazes at them through an interdisciplinary lens; social studies are the study of life.

How does one refrain from educating citizens of a community (be it local, national, international, and/or cosmic) about the very surrounding within which they live? It is not really a question of why or should the social sciences be taught, but *how* should they be taught. Social studies are an integral part of literally all aspects of our world as we know it. Studying the social sciences also fosters active citizenry among learners. Public participation is not synonymous with voting, though this is the image that most recall when contemplating such a phrase. Being an active citizen also encompasses (but is certainly not limited to) analyzing social issues and remaining critical of them, keeping up on past, present, and future events, writing letters to the editor or journals, offering up alternatives to current courses of action/inaction, and taking part in the economic sphere.

I believe it would be a disservice to all of education and more importantly, to students if the social sciences were not an area of focus in school curriculum. It is no

exaggeration that if the social sciences were not taught, it would likely stifle ideas such as religious, cultural, and racial acceptance, political and economic awareness on macro scales, and even self realization of where an individual fits into it all. The social sciences are an indispensable aspect in the growth of academia and public welfare.

2) What, in your view, are the three main issues facing social studies education in the new millennium? How do you believe those issues should and could be addressed?

While there are many issues facing social studies education and educators in the future, the three that are the most pressing are the institution of core/common assessments, “highly qualified” certifications, and mandated cross-curricular classrooms. These concerns are pertinent to both social studies as a curriculum and a profession—since the two are so deeply intertwined in education.

Core, or common, assessments are forms of evaluating student knowledge on a standard scale meant to be measured and compared across benchmarks. Many school districts are on a campaign all over the United States to implement common assessments and components in all core class disciplines which is intended to maximize competence on such standardized tests as the MME. In U.S. History, and specifically at Charlotte High School, all unit tests given are common throughout all sections. The tests are timed; include an essay portion which requires the use crafting an argument and support of core democratic values, and are then evaluated through Data Direct

software. Because educators are working in a climate of high-stakes testing, this is becoming a critical part of the crafting of social studies curriculum.

The second issue, “high qualified” certifications, is part of the No Child Left Behind (2001) mandate which has infiltrated all public schools with the intention of extending a quality education to all students. Under “highly qualified,” educators must possess full state endorsements in every subject taught. This is why the RX certification of social studies teachers is a must – the ability to be considered “highly qualified” in all of the social sciences. Without it an educator may find that s/he is unauthorized by law to be teaching certain subject areas, regardless of how many years they previously taught it. Even though this has come under plenty of scrutiny, it is still a law which all education professionals must abide by.

The reason why social studies are especially hit by such a mandate is because there are so many subcategories of the discipline (history, geography, civics, etc.). This is why the issue of being either “highly qualified” or not is such an important issue when it comes to employability, keeping a job, and the frame of mind which administrators must consider their staff.

Being “highly qualified” or not leads to the third most important issue facing social studies education: cross curricular classrooms. The most effective way to address this topic is with an example. Teachers who have graduated with a teaching degree typically have a major and minor. An example would be a major in History and a minor in Spanish. Unless that person earns the RX certification, s/he is no longer considered to be “highly qualified” to teach U.S. History under current standards. This is because U.S.

History has become U.S. History/Geography—with an important geographical component included right in. While most teachers of the social sciences prescribe to being cross-curricular anyway, this carries even deeper consequences. It is legally binding. Now, with the social sciences becoming combined legally, it is forcing teachers to be fully endorsed in every category—pushing some out of jobs and keeping others out.

3) Assuming you get your own social studies classroom next year, how would you organize and set it up (How would you organize students' desks? Where would you locate your own desk? How would you decorate your classroom, with what?) and WHY (that is, what are the pedagogical reasons behind your decisions)?

With the hopes of getting my own classroom next year, I have carefully considered how to best decorate and arrange elements in the room to maximize a learning environment and caring atmosphere. From the arrangement of student desks, my own desk, and choices of decoration, these are all aspects to be taken seriously into account as they set the tone for all participants in the learning experience.

In order to encourage the quality and quantity of student/student and student/teacher interaction, I would place students' desks in a "U" shape. This allows students to face each other while maintaining a view of the front of the room. The "U" also makes it easy for me to move around during lessons, adequately assist students, and perfect classroom management. While some may have the pedagogy of wanting students all facing forward and listening silently, I do not personally envision this in my

own room. How does one educate about human interaction without promoting it positively in classrooms?

My own desk would be located in the front of the room so that I can monitor the room during times when it becomes necessary for me to multi-task. This serves the very real function of me being easily located by students for questions, concerns, and/or the acquisition of materials kept there for student use. Having the desk in the back of the room might not be ideal for times when substitutes are in the room, when other faculty/adults need to speak with me, and/or if anyone needs to drop something off without disrupting the entire class. These are highly practical reasons for the placement of the teacher's desk.

Other important aspects to any room are also the surroundings since this creates an impression on students from the first day. I plan to have my classroom decorated with student work, pictures, posters, plants, and other "plush" decorations. The reasoning for this is all for the advancement of relationship building with my students. Having student work up on display not only gives students a sense of pride in what they have done, but also to give them a sense of familiarity. This will give them the feeling that this is their room too. Posters would be advertising colleges, provoke achievement, success, and persistence, and would also show students that higher standards are what I am trying to foster on a daily basis. Yet, I do not want the room to seem harsh or institutionalize, so that is why I would try to bring in plants, actual photographs of beautiful geographic places (still within the lines of the social sciences

as they would be places we study in the curriculum), and decorations. Hopefully this would give my classroom a much friendlier, more welcome feel.

4) What are your thoughts about the Michigan Standards for social studies? Have you worked to incorporate those in your teaching (if so, how? If not, why)? What are your thoughts about the MEAP? Have you been preparing your students for the MEAP (if so, how? If not, why)?

As an educator, I have a unique outlook on standardized tests since I have been an open-ended question grader for a couple years. Through my years involved in the educational system I have been on nearly all sides of the testing process. I have taken tests, administered them, graded them, and evaluated the results. The only aspect to the standardized tests that I have not yet done is to create the questions and/or rubric. Yet, I have spent a long time behind the scenes and feel that they are useful, if considered alongside their true limitations.

Standards are beneficial in that they create common criteria with which to hold teachers, administrators, and students accountable for certain information that has been deemed important. They should not be considered stifling, as they still allow plenty of freedom in their implementation. There is *some* leeway, if teachers can defend their reasoning, to covering additional topics.

Students have been prepared for the MME in my U.S. History classroom through the use of core assessments, essay questions in standard format, and timed tests. These have been applied consistently in order to get students comfortable with test procedure, built up skills through repeated practice, and for teachers to gauge where students need

the most assistance in preparation for the test. I have also taken time in helping the students in the class develop test-taking techniques. This is an issue that has been taken extremely seriously.

5) Looking back at your internship, are you the kind of teacher you thought you would be? In what ways are you the teacher you thought you would never be? Provide at least three examples that would illustrate what each meant in the classroom.

Humor has always been an integral part of my life and the way my family and I have always interacted. When I was very young, I remember my grandfather (a drafting and shop teacher for 35 years) joking around with me even in discipline. When I decided to become a teacher a little more than two years ago, I tried to envision what I might be like as an educator. One of the tactics that I thought I would use regularly is humor, even in lighter discipline situations.

What I found in my internship year was that I used humor to lighten situations that were possibly contentious between students, to tell students “no” without having to sound dictatorial, and when I wanted to steer off personal questions. Even though I was worried about whether I could successfully pull off humor in these types of situations, I believe that it worked rather well. For example, I used humor to deflect a potentially confrontational situation what when a freshman in my Oriole time (a 45 minute study hall/tutor session) was being rowdy. I asked him twice to settle down but he went on being disruptive to others in the class. Finally, I stopped everything and told him that this was his final official warning and that the next time he was distracting

others I would change his seat to be right by me. "You don't want to do that, I assure you," I said in a light-hearted manner. "I am *terribly* boring!" He laughed, along with a couple other students, and said jokingly, "yeah, no kidding. I would probably fall asleep!!" He was just fine after that. I believe this worked mostly because I was able to give him a warning, laced with a real consequence, that did not shame him in front of the class. We could both laugh it off, knowing full well that I was serious.

Not everything I did this year was an example of me being the teacher I thought I would be. In fact, there are two important deviations from this image that surprised me: I did not correct every "wrong doing" and I often considered individual student circumstances when I acted. I always thought that I would be rather strict, expecting every student to abide by all rules at all times. If they did not, I figured I would easily correct it and remain firm. The reality of my internship was not that at all. In fact, I was very laid back, but not a push over. I truly believe that I applied rules fairly and consistently—but my definition of "fair" did change.

For nearly a day and a half I thought this was a good approach, but learned very quickly that this was not the way to truly run a classroom. My teaching philosophy has evolved where I strive to build strong relationships with students so that out of respect for me and the rest of the class, they will choose not to break the rules. In fact, I believe that they will self-regulate. An example of this was when I was instructing and two students kept whispering to each other. Finally, another student told them to "stop being rude." They quieted down and I never heard them talking again for the remainder of the period.



Part of building these strong relationships is letting students know that you care about them and are concerned about their individual situations. While I believe in applying all rules fairly and consistently, I no longer believe that “fair” means treating everyone identically. This assumes that people are identical – which is false. What really changed my mind about this was when I had a student who was exceptional in class. He was very intelligent, always actively participated, but somehow was failing the course. For some reason, he would not turn in assignments that were meant for homework. After doing a bit of research on my own, I found out that his father was abusive, his mother had recently lost her job, they had been evicted from their trailer, and his part-time job was the only thing supporting his mother, sister, and him. To a student like that, where does homework fit into the equation when he is worried about the next meal? Instead, I met with him one-on-one and set up an assignment plan in which his were due in sections that he could complete in class. His grade drastically increased within the next couple of weeks. It was not that this student was incapable or unwilling to do his work, he was simply trying to survive and Western Civilization was not figured in as a priority.

6) If you were not restricted by the particular demands of your mentor/school, an externally-directed social studies curriculum and/or a textbook, what and how would you teach differently (use this answer to imagine the kind of social studies education you would like to pursue with your students but feel you are unable to do so under current conditions)?

At my placement, the school has a policy of no “rewards.” Faculty are not allowed to award student behavior with movies, leaving a few minutes early, parties, food/drinks, or anything else that might be considered “non-educational.” I would thoroughly enjoy the ability to make this decision in my own classroom as I feel this is part of my teaching pedagogy. First and foremost in my mind is the ability, and critical impact, of building strong relationships with students on a daily basis. I would like to be able to reward my students when they have gone above and beyond, after a grueling unit or section, or perhaps because it creates mutual respect. Of course, this is something that should not be done lightly, or over used. Rewards are only special when they happen very intermittently. But I believe they should be permitted on the basis of teacher discretion.

The second change I would like to make would be to have a *completely* projects based course with more ability to pursue the types of extended issues and deep social studies thinking that we discuss in our Teacher Education classes. Because educators are now working in a climate that is highly standards and benchmarks, as well as standardized test, based there is a severe drive to keep on schedule. What would be nice is to have a U.S. History/Geography or World History course that is completely projects based and free of MMC (Michigan Merit Curriculum) guides. This would allow me the freedom of being able to touch on issues more in-depth than I currently am able. It is not that I would enjoy doing this as much as I believe students would benefit from this type of social studies curriculum.

7) What has been the most important lesson you have learned in your practicum about social studies education?

I am very proud to say that the most important lesson I have learned about social studies education I learned from my mentor teacher during my internship. It was not something he said, but rather his example that has been a highly positive and enlightening influence on me. What I have found is that the social sciences need to become a lifestyle, not just a curriculum.

I love to read, but this year I read more than I ever have before—devouring books on a weekly basis. But these books were more curricular based for me. Of all the social science disciplines, political science is my real forte. Nevertheless, I was placed in a history classroom. While I have always been interested in ancient history, I have never studied it (or the other branches of history) as exhaustive as I have this year; and I am not simply talking about reading the textbook. I was constantly reading in my free time to learn more about the subjects in depth. I also kept up on current issues as they related to the history topics I was teaching. Now, I have grown to have an insatiable desire for reading anything and everything involved in the social sciences; I cannot seem to get enough of them. But reading them is not just to increase my content knowledge power. It is so I am able to provide these extra materials to students. Many times I made copies of important readings that were used to supplement the textbook in order to give students a more rounded view of history.

This has become lifestyle for me, as I have witnessed it for my mentor, and I am constantly looking for ways to make real-life connections for students and the social sciences. I feel this is a central part to making the discipline relevant to students so they will not only learn, they will *want* to. As a social studies teacher, if I do not make this a part of my life, how can I expect that of students?

8) What is the most significant lesson you were able to learn from your mentor teacher and why?

Since my most significant lesson I learned from my mentor was also the most important lesson I learned about social studies education, I will discuss another vital lesson I learned from him. I have taken away a modified classroom management teaching philosophy in that relationship building with students is the number one key to *great* classroom management. A teacher can have good classroom management skills with students learning without building solid relationships. But to have *great* classroom management requires good student/teacher interaction. This way, students follow the expectations of the class because they have enough respect for the teacher and this fosters a caring and highly conducive learning environment.

I realize that many new teachers struggle with classroom management especially in the beginning, but often for years to come. While I do not purport to have classroom management skills that are to the level of a veteran teacher, I believe that I am not experiencing nearly as much strife as so many others do. I wish I could take full credit

for this, but I cannot. My mentor has played a huge role in my ability to manage a classroom successfully, to encourage student learning, and construct meaningful relationships with students.

This was severely tested when I was given the responsibility at the beginning of my internship year to build a classroom from scratch with 25 freshmen. This was called Oriole Time—a 45 minute study hall/tutoring session in which I sustained the Freshmen Mentoring Program in my room by frequently assisting mentors and students. I had to establish my own rules, seating charts, class materials, and rapport with students. This was not easy at first, but as time went on, I found this to be rewarding as things began to work out. In the end, I built strong relationships with my students that even surpassed that of all other classes I instructed. I believe that this is because I worked the hardest on this class than any other for the benefit of the students and the Mentoring Program. What I implemented was my mentor's strategies with my own spin—and I am confident that it worked for me as the year progressed. Relationship building is the most important component to classroom management and effective teaching.

9) If I were to ask your mentor teacher what s/he thought was the most significant contribution you made to her/his thinking about teaching social studies, what is it you think s/he would say? That is, how has your being in her/his classroom enabled her/him to think differently about social studies education?

If my mentor teacher had to answer this question about me, it would probably be my inclusion of topics of the “east” into the Western Civilization course and my consistent use of primary sources throughout the medieval unit. These were the most fundamental changes that I made to his current curriculum from the beginning.

If there is one issue in the social sciences that I feel the most strongly about, it is the inclusion of eastern studies in the classroom—especially if and how it is implemented. Not only do I consider the east to be absolutely essential to understanding the west, I also find that it decreases ignorance about current issues when students appreciate other cultures. In my experiences, all my students that thought negatively about eastern peoples spoke merely out of naivety. If social studies are meant to create active and *informed* citizens, then how can eastern studies be left out of the picture? One cannot fully appreciate the history of the U.S., and especially the world, without studying the east.

The second point my mentor might say is about the primary sources I used. Carrying on this idea of a rounded education involving the social studies, I believe that primary and secondary sources are indispensable. Still, it requires a honed skill to read, comprehend, and fully analyze these sources. That is why I dedicated an entire day in my Western Civilization class to the introduction of primary and secondary sources, defining them and giving specific examples. While this took time and was frustrating for some students in the beginning, it was an investment worth making. I also used primary documents in Advanced Placement European History and U.S. History/Geography classes. I truly cannot envision a social studies curriculum without

such sources. Now, I do not think that my mentor will either. I already know that he is planning on using many of the sources I implemented next year in his classes.

10) If I asked the same question of your students, what do you think they might tell me?

I firmly believe that if my students were asked this question, they would say that I constantly connected ancient history with current issues and trends, showing them how “ancient” civilizations have a direct effect on their lives today. This was a real goal I strived for and believe that it was accomplished many times – though not as much as I would have liked. It was rewarding to see students smile and light up when they realized the connections of the past to the present. I loved hearing students say, “Wow, I never knew that!” I think this may have changed how some students think about ancient history. Hopefully they do not consider it to be such an inconsequential chain of events that happened “forever” ago.

11) Tell me about what you consider to be your best lesson or unit and what, in your view, made them the "best"?

My best lesson took place during my most rewarding unit: the medieval unit. This is because I went all out in my efforts to maximize the use of primary and secondary documents (even creating an extensive packet of 14 articles analyzed daily), technology (PowerPoint, student led internet research, video clips, etc.), discussions, graphic representations, and alternative assessments (especially a “video quiz” of the

medieval period using relatively new video releases). Even though it was my most difficult unit, and required the most work on my part, it was by far my best. But it was not perfect. There are many things I would change for the next time and I cannot wait for the opportunity to do so!

My best lesson was most likely about feudalism because I truly stuck to the 20 minute rule and used as many alternative ways of instructing as I could think of. I utilized multiple charts, a few PowerPoint slides, student role-playing, interactive worksheets, and lecture. The students really seemed to learn as I informally assessed them. I got to see the "lights" turn on for many of them as this is actually a confusing topic (feudalism and manorialism). This was my favorite lesson all year because I felt as though the students learned the most that day. I would still make a few changes, but overall it was worthwhile to see students struggle at first and then begin to understand as the lesson progressed.

12) Tell me about what you consider to be your worst lesson or unit and what, in your view, made them the "worst"?

My worst lesson was likely when I was trying to get through the entire Peloponnesian War in one day. Even though I knew it was a long and daunting lecture, I felt I needed to get through the information that day in order to make sure that the dates I had scheduled the computer lab would still be relevant. This was a practical lesson for me to learn as a teacher about the realities of trying to get through material.



Should I have pushed through so much in one day for the sake of the lab? As I reflect on it now, I probably would not do that again. How much did students really learn as they sat there taking in plenty of information passively as I lectured? It may have been better to forgo the lab and split the lesson up into a couple days. In my opinion, the students would have learned more from that than a day full of lecture and two days in the lab. I am thankful to be able to consider that as an experience to learn from so that I can implement the lesson better next time.

13) Tell me about a time when you and you mentor teacher or field instructor disagreed about whether a lesson went well or not. Where do you think those different perspectives about the same lesson come from? What did they teach you about learning to teach?

This may appear strange, or highly unusual, but my mentor teacher and I had a fantastic working relationship all throughout the year. So much so, that I cannot think of a single time that we disagreed about anything, let alone about how well a lesson went. Many people working together so closely for nine months would probably have found at least one area they disagreed, but my mentor and I meshed well together and worked towards common goals. He and I saw lessons, student behavior, and ways to implement changes in the same light.

My field instructor and I worked well together as well, but there were a couple times that his pedagogy and mine did not always match. We did not argue, or outwardly disagree, but often discussed the issue knowing that we were not coming to

the exact same conclusions. An example of this (which is a situation in which I am not entirely sure if he even knows I disagreed with him) is when my instructor gave tips about keeping students awake in class. He was visiting for an observation and saw a student sleeping in the back that has exhibited this behavior each time. He asked me about this student and I explained to him that both my mentor teacher and I have talked to him both in and out of class, contacted his mother, and have continued the conversation with his guidance counselor. Yet, he still sleeps each day in class.

My field instructor offered me advice, but I must admit that I found it to be a cruel form of punishment; ultimately I did not feel comfortable at all engaging in that type of classroom management. I listened as he spoke but did not plan to ever incorporate it. He advised me to call out a chronic sleeping student in class and make him or her stand in the back of the room for 15-20 minutes. "Tell him or her that they have lost their sitting privileges for a while. They get mad, but they are awake at least; probably not paying attention at that point, but awake."

This indicated to me on a strong level that people have very different pedagogies to get to the same means. What may work well for one teacher does not/may not work for another. In his classroom such a technique might be pulled off fine, but I could not help but think that this type of alternative would only be cause for resentment from students instead of actually keeping them awake for the reasons I would like. I do not believe that such a harsh form of punishment is something I would consider.

14) How do you see the role of technology in the social studies classroom? In what ways did you incorporate technology in your teaching and to what ends?

Technology should not be used in social studies curriculum simply for the sake of using it. Too often, the use of technology is viewed in the educative field as a neat trend, or a way to claim excellent teaching ability. I have also found throughout my internship year that the empty use of technology is used in place of the educator – such as videos or internet projects that are not followed up on during class. In social studies, technology can best be utilized to help simulate real world tasks, or as an authentic activity.

While I know that I have personally fallen victim to this same fall back strategy at times, I strive to be sure I do not do this on a regular basis. Social studies is infamous for its use of videos; when a teacher needs to have a substitute teacher, is required to attend to obligations elsewhere, or is not feeling well, a video used to teach is not necessarily the worst alternative. Yet, there are certainly more effective ways to teach with technology.

I used technology in my projects based Western Civilization course. At one point during the semester (the Roman unit) I had students create Time magazines in which they were required to apply the ten themes used throughout the course. I also had students create resumes for Renaissance people in order to highlight the important information regarding their lives. These projects served the practical purpose of giving students a chance to do research, write like journalists, and develop business skills while still learning about the period.

15) Tell me how you addressed the issue of ESL students and/or students with disabilities in your social studies classroom?

Throughout the course of the year (across two semesters), I had several 504 plan students in my class – most of which were visual learners. I was constantly attempting to modify lessons in order to reach them while still maximizing the benefit of all students. Because of my firm belief that every student in my class has the right to a quality educational experience, I took these requirements seriously.

In order to teach my visual students better, I implemented more picture-friendly PowerPoint presentations, charts, graphs, maps, and other visuals into the classroom than there were before. While many students typically benefit from having graphic representations of information and ways that make organizing data simpler, the 504 students that I had in the room usually need additional assistance with this. I would often add extra pictures or visual cues that they could use later in helping them to recall important information.

Many students also had reading comprehension difficulties. This made following written directions an involved task at times, so I also began reading all written directions so students could benefit from oral directions as well. Soon afterwards, I found that assignments were being completed more closely to expectations and the quality of work increased. Therefore, I believe that helping to accommodate the 504 students actually benefited many others in the room.

16) One of the words often heard in educational discourse is interdisciplinary. Tell me how, if at all, you think that term relates to social studies education and if you think it does, what have you done (or plan to do) to make it more feasible in your social studies classroom?

There is definitely a reason why the term “interdisciplinary” is common language when discussing the education of the social sciences. This is because they cannot be adequately taught without being interdisciplinary. In fact, many times the word “interdisciplinary” is part of the overall term: interdisciplinary social sciences. I believe that the social sciences are, fundamentally, cross-curricular. There is no other discipline that is so large and encompassing. What are the social sciences if they are not an inclusion of all other subjects through a particular lens?

In my own classroom, I have implemented certain assignments that were either intended to be cross-curricular or simply happened to be because of the nature of this subject area. As mentioned earlier, I used plenty of primary and secondary sources. These were not always academic readings. Actually, they were often old poems, short stories, letters, and certificates. Assignments accompanying required students to analyze and sometimes recreate similar documents for modern issues.

I also required plenty of writing assignments to be completed in my Western Civilization course. These were not only graded for content, but also for their writing skills overall. Since my students were all eleventh and twelfth graders, with nearly of them college bound, I knew being as interdisciplinary with them would be beneficial for the next step in their educative careers.

17) What professional organizations, associations, and journals in social studies are available for your continued professional development as a teacher?

There are several academic writings that are helpful in the advancement of my education as a teacher – since a good teacher always remains a reflective student. Some of these include the Political Science Quarterly (for political, social, and economic issues), The History Cooperative ([www.historycooperative.org](http://www.historycooperative.org)), the Library of Congress, and the National Council for the Social Studies. Each of these not only provides continuing knowledge in content areas, they are also excellent resources for preparing for lessons.

18) What is the role of the teacher in the total school environment?

Being a teacher is more than being in a classroom, performing professional duties, and coming up with interesting ways to relate subject matter to student lives. It stretches beyond conductive interactions among colleagues. And it certainly is more than being active within the school district. Certainly it is all those things, but it is much more than that. The role of a teacher touches the farthest reaches of the concept of community as a whole.

Teachers educate about more than simply their subject areas. They are role models for the young, which entrusts within them the necessity to continuously act in a

professional and thoughtful manner. When they travel, they characterize one of the most sacred occupations held within any community and therefore represent this populous anywhere they go.

But it is not merely adequate to be an active citizen; the teacher should always be participatory within the school district itself. I take this from a purely relationship standpoint. A teacher that invests in the community will receive a return on such an investment by having students that respect them, parents that identify with them, and staff that is aware of his/her dedication. A teacher does not hire into a school department or district, s/he is a vital part of the entire community.

19) How will you help students feel a sense of connection by being a part of your classroom?

Building a caring and inclusive classroom has been my number one goal from the first time I considered becoming a teacher. Making sure that all students feel safe and valued is without a doubt the most essential aspect in fostering a learning environment that brings out the best in all learners. Yet, wanting to create this type of environment is more complicated than having the desire to do so. It requires a teacher to validate student responses, call students by name, and be considerate of their concerns.

Not every response offered by a student during instruction is exactly right. In fact, sometimes a student is completely off the mark. But nothing will stifle students' feelings of being valued in a class more than a teacher flat out telling him/her

(especially in front of the class) that s/he is wrong. A teacher should work deliberately to validate all responses in some way, even if it means asking others in the room if anyone can “help him /her out”. Some validation remarks include: “You bet!” “Exactly!” “You’re on the right track, can you say more?” “That’s not what I was looking for, but I can definitely see how you came to that conclusion. I never thought of it that way before.” Each of these provides a gamut of ways to confirm a student’s interaction as beneficial.

Using first or last names to call out students shows them that you have taken the time to get to know them. It also indicates that you are personally speaking to them, and not just generally at the class. This helps to not only build relationships with students, but to make them feel that they belong. If students feel comfortable, they are more likely to participate and respect the teacher. It is when students believe that a teacher does not care that they neglect investment in the success of the class as well.

Students are prone to complaining or groaning when homework or reading is assigned—which is natural. However, sometimes students have legitimate concerns about something going on in the classroom, their lives, or in general. If a teacher takes the time to understand this problem, provide alternatives, and/or helps the student to rectify the situation, the entire class will be the better for it. This helps students to feel connected to the classroom in that they know that what they believe will be heard by an individual of authority that genuinely cares.



20) Describe a time when you tried something and it did not work. How did you respond?

Organizing higher level group work for upper classmen was intimidating to me when I first started teaching at Charlotte. I was afraid that it would not work and that students would quickly tire of the project. Yet, in one of my very first lessons I decided to go ahead and assign a chapter section jigsaw for students to complete in groups of 5 or 6 so that they could learn the information in an alternative way. Unfortunately, this did not go as well as I had hoped but I noticed within the first 10 minutes that the task was headed for disaster. They were finishing at very different times and left waiting.

I saw this coming and had to think quickly. What could students do while some were finishing up? How could I be sure that it would not seem like more work but would be beneficial to the overall assignment? I quickly thought about how the information they were to jigsaw could be charted out and drew this up on the board. I asked students from each group to fill out the chart based on the data they have collected from the text. It worked.

In the end, the lesson was more effective than it would have been originally. This new twist on my group assignment keep students busy while others worked and at the same time created a graphic representation that students would be able to study at a later date. I was relieved that I was able to correct a major flaw in my original group assignment before it became noticeable or too chaotic. Students filled out the chart on the board and drew their own on paper. This chart also provided a way for the section to be discussed as a class for the benefit of all.

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Ultimately, this was a learning experience that I considered each time I planned for group work. The chart was also so effective that I perfected it more as the year progressed, eventually passing out pre-made charts for students to fill in, internet research assignments with charts, and always a discussion that wrapped it up to be sure that all students were on the same page as everyone else.