

I have recently finished an 8-week placement at the Wayne County Schools Career Center in Wooster, Ohio, where I had the opportunity to work with 11th and 12th grade math students. This experience not only helped me grow immensely as an educator, but also helped me develop a more focused philosophy of Adolescent and Young Adult education.

One of the most beneficial skills I developed this semester was the ability to reflect upon my experiences in the classroom. In the sixth edition of *Dynamics of Effective Secondary Teaching*, Wilen, Hutchinson, and Ishler note that because “people learn best through active involvement and through thinking about and becoming articulate about what they have learned,” reflection is a very powerful skill for teachers to possess. In my weekly blog reflections, meetings with my cooperating teacher, and formal lesson reflections, I was able to scrutinize my instructional methods and decision-making processes to discover positive and negative aspects of my teaching. I was then able to plan instruction that continued successful components and also incorporated different methods to change the less successful components of my teaching.

As I thought about how to improve the less effective components of my teaching, I realized that it was necessary to research the most recent pedagogical principles. In the beginning of my field experience, I discovered through reflection that I needed to implement more critical thinking into my lessons. To find the most effective way to do this, I consulted the sixth edition of *Dynamics of Effective Secondary Teaching*. From this text, I learned that asking higher-level-cognitive questions could help not only actively engage students in discussion, but also encourage them to think critically about the material. As I implemented higher-level-cognitive questions into my lessons, students

had an opportunity to practice and further develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. From this experience, I learned first hand that it is necessary for teachers to reflect upon their curriculum models and instructional methods, to research the most recent pedagogical principles, and to then prepare lessons that connect pedagogy with content in order to deliver the most effective instruction.

When making decisions about how to be most effective in the classroom, it is also important to reference and adhere to professional standards. These standards describe characteristics of successful educators that teachers should strive to achieve. This semester, I familiarized myself with the Standards for Ohio Educators, which promote the development of student-centered, professional, and pedagogically informed educators. As I combined knowledge of student learning, mathematical content, effective instruction and varied assessment, learning environments, collaboration, and professionalism in my field placement, I achieved the seven ODE standards that characterize effective educators. As I met these standards, I felt more confident in the classroom and more able to deliver effective instruction.

A key component of delivering effective instruction is the ability to communicate information in a clear and professional manner. Teachers need to speak clearly and write with clarity so that students can understand the information we convey. Wilen, Hutchinson, and Ishler also offer several suggestions to increase the effectiveness of teacher communication. By defining difficult terms and concepts, as well as providing examples and illustrations, content may become more comprehensible to students. Additionally, planning thorough lessons, complete with introductions, bodies of instruction, and conclusions can increase content comprehensibility. Introductions should

inform students what content will be covered, why it is important to know, and how it fits into the unit of study. The body of instruction should be well-organized and present content in a logical manner, building off of what students already know, while also moving from simple to more complex ideas. Finally, conclusions should review what has been presented, determine the extent of what students have learned, and make connections to later learning activities. When planning these components into their lessons, teachers provide a necessary structure that increases communication and enhances student learning.

Teachers can also enhance student learning through the use of instructional technologies in their classrooms. Technology not only makes learning fun and engaging, but it can also increase student understanding of content. During my field placement, I had the opportunity to implement several different technologies into my lessons and to see their positive effects on student learning. One of the most effective pieces of technology I used during my field placement was the SMART Board. Students became more attentive and engaged as I drew brightly colored graphs on the screen. Also, students were able to interact with the material in new and exciting way when asked to create their own graphs on the SMART Board. Students increased attentiveness and hands-on manipulation of the material led to a more thorough understanding of the content.

When considering what technologies and other instructional strategies to incorporate into their lessons, it is important for teachers to consider the needs of all their students. Because of the diversity in today's classrooms, teachers must understand and be able to apply a variety of instructional methods and strategies to help all students reach

their full potential. Wilen, Hutchinson, and Ishler offer several strategies to meet the needs of all students in a classroom. To accommodate intellectual diversities in a classroom, teachers should plan lessons and activities that incorporate all eight of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, giving all students the chance to succeed. To accommodate cultural diversities in a classroom, teachers must learn about the cultural backgrounds of their students and understand the possible impacts that students' culture and upbringing may have on their classroom behaviors. Teachers must then utilize this information and implement effective strategies to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms.

So what have I come to believe about Adolescent and Young adult educators? I believe teachers need to be reflective practitioners, constantly reviewing their own methods to find strengths and weaknesses; active researchers, aware of the most recent pedagogical principles; knowledgeable instructors with the ability to connect content to pedagogy; autonomous decision makers who strive to meet professional standards; effective communicators who write coherently and speak clearly; progressive educators who incorporate technology into their classrooms; and global leaders, meeting the needs of all students in today's diverse classrooms.