

My First Teaching Experience

By Dr. Thomas Doyal

My introduction to curriculum philosophy and history came as a "baptism under fire." I graduated with a degree in Elementary Education from in the month of December. I was immediately hired to take over a 3rd grade classroom that had some "challenges." My first experience involved a class in a school that was completely out of control.

I tried to piece together a profile of what had been done in the class prior to my arrival. There were no records, lesson plans or any tangible plans that I could build on. There were textbooks for the various subjects. I tried to construct a series of lesson plans using the material that was available. The classroom discipline was nonexistent, so it took several days before I could determine that virtually none of the students could read at the level of any of the textbooks.

Guess what?? Time for plan B. Since the material was above the reading level of virtually all of my students, I needed to get creative. The education school I had just graduated from prepared me well to teach students on or near grade level. I was taught in my education classes to "administer" the provided curriculum. I was challenged to think outside the box.

Fortunately, shortly after starting my challenging teaching position, I attended a workshop and learned a strategy called IDEA. It was a teaching process to centralize all of the subject matter around one central theme. I chose to take one page in our science text that focused on 1 concept and used that for an entire week. I developed a 10-word vocabulary list pulling words from that page. These words became the words at the center of our language arts, art, science, handwriting (3rd grade introduces cursive), math, creative writing and everything for that week. I planned our week something like this:

Monday

- Introduce the words
- Read the page (teacher) several times to model
- Snap reading. Each student reads a sentence, says snap and chooses the next reader with rewards if you are listening and know which sentence is next
- discuss the science content
- homework: write the words 3 times each

Tuesday

- Read page again (teacher and students)
- further discussion of science concept
- as a class create sentences using 5 of the words. Discuss science content
- discuss punctuation, spelling etc.
- students write context sentences
- put their sentences to music using a familiar melody (twinkle twinkle)
- then use a drum beat to make a rap
- create other extension activities for math, social studies

-homework: write 1 sentence using each of the 5 words. They receive 2 grades, 1 for grammar 1 for proper science content.

Wednesday

-similar to Tuesday using the other 5 words

-introduce other literature

Thursday

-Using a simple template, they write a short essay using 2 or 3 of the vocab words. They have an introductory paragraph, create 2 or 3 paragraphs using words of their choice and end with a concluding sentence.

-Review all vocabulary words

-find related reading material and videos to share with the class

-homework: study for spelling test

Friday

-spelling test

-work on correcting the essay

-rewrite the essay with corrections

-create a coversheet for the essay (drawn, painted, collage, etc)

-post display the essays

This is a sketch of what we did. After 6 or 8 weeks, the students thrived on the routine.

As we progressed, I modified the lessons to challenge them. I added more words, more pages from the science text, etc. I set up a microphone for students to read in to in front of the class (voluntary). The principal was quite pleased.

I was excised from that school (the danger of being on the bottom of the tenure list). I went to a middle school as a science/language arts teacher. My partner taught social studies and math. I was tossed into the same fire. Our school used a science curriculum from The University of Alabama. I was hired at the start of the school year and wasn't trained to teach Alabama Science so I had to "create my own" curriculum. There were no textbooks available so I had to improvise. My partner didn't want his allotted 4 computers, so I moved them in to my room and networked them with my 4 and found a few others. We were required to use an integrated computer program called CCC. It had math, science and language. AHA!!! The science had units with teacher guides, laser discs, etc. I had the basis for content. I used the model from my 3rd grade class to integrate science into language arts. This time I added much more. I introduced the multimedia presentation software HyperStudio.

The students again culminate their week with an essay based on the week's science concept. They converted their essay content into a HyperStudio presentation. The "art" cover sheet became the cover for the computer generated presentation. The intro paragraph became the first slide and so on.

The program was so successful that the CCC software company used my classroom to bring prospective clients to showcase their product. I was also invited to present my ideas on integrating multimedia into the classroom at The FETC (Florida Education

Technology Conference). I was also asked to run workshops for Palm Beach County Schools, teaching strategies for integrating multimedia into the curriculum.

I eventually added more digital recording technology into the classroom such as digital audio recording and video production.

Now, as a media specialist, I write my entire curriculum for library skills, television production, character education, research skills and more.

The circumstances in which I found myself early in my teaching career helped shape my future as an educator. Being forced to produce and modify the curriculum I was given challenged my creativity. It also forced me to focus on the skills and educational needs of the individuals I was working with. This was and continues to be an important factor in designing effective instructional materials.