

In the words of William Arthur Ward, “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” These words have impacted my career as an educator. Past experiences helped mold me into the inspirational educator I am today. I work at a Title One school, where many students are living in environments I was accustomed to. I know what it is like to face many obstacles ranging from growing up in a single-parent home to entertaining thoughts of dropping out of school. My discouragements can be attributed to the fact that I grew up with a speech impediment and learning disability. The combination of the two made me a target of harassment and bullying at school by my peers and teachers. As a result, I failed 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades.

Despite the aforementioned challenges, it was hard work and perseverance that placed me in the position I am in today, an agent of change. Each day I wake up, I enter the school building with an intent to make a difference in the lives of my students and colleagues. Daily, my students attend school with a lot of baggage. This baggage includes hunger, not having clean clothes, no one to assist with homework, or having to take care of younger siblings. To ensure each one of their success, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs assists me in meeting the needs of my students. My classroom is a place where my students’ basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs are met.

Qualities that make me an inspirational teacher are the ability to show empathy, the ability to recognize my role as an educator, and, more importantly, to show respect. I am considered an inspirational teacher because before I teach anything in my class, I first capture the hearts of my students. This can be achieved by establishing relationships that create a setting where empathy is displayed. I focus on understanding the person behind the baggage. At my school, I noticed high levels of absenteeism because of dirty clothing. I initiated a campaign, and within 24 hours, I had a brand-new washer and dryer donated to my school to help reduce this problem.

As an advocate for education, I understand the importance of having qualified teachers in the classroom. I assist my district in providing professional development opportunities in classroom management and obtaining teacher certification. When I discover research strategies that may be used to close the achievement gaps, I am not hesitant to share with my colleagues.

Describe how inspirational instruction has changed the trajectory of students’ lives in your classroom.

George Couros said it best, “The curriculum tells you what not how. The how is the artistry in education.” Each year as an educator, I am given blank canvases. At the end of the year I am measured based on how my canvases look. Each day I enter the classroom, I enter with an intent to expose my students to creative inquiry every day. My lessons focus on rigor, relevance, and relationships. I understand my role as an educator and the importance of building relationships with my students. Such relationships have caused my students to want to come to school daily. I am often told by my students that they can relate to the lesson, and I always make it fun. As a result of my believing in them, they push harder.

As a fifth-grade science educator, many students are not exposed to science content until this grade because of state mandates. Prior to accepting the position to teach science only, fifth-grade students performed collectively at 32% proficiency. To date, our Science scores have increased to over 50% proficiency. After noticing that students were not actively engaged in the Science content, I incorporated project-based learning. During each lesson, I create opportunities engage in the world around them.

During my life science lesson, my students were able to recognize the importance of plants to our ecosystem. We explored ways in which plants can grow using natural or artificial light. Additionally, students were able to meet with local farmers and were able to learn ways in which they can grow their own food in small spaces. These lessons changed the mindset of my students. My students are now able to develop their identity as scientist by being exposed to real-world problem-solving opportunities.

After adopting the concept that science instruction can be taught everywhere, I have exposed my students to many virtual field trips around the world. These virtual field trips have improved student learning. When teaching, I ensure that my students understand the value of the content and how it is meaningful to everyday life.

Also, in my classroom, I have established an environment that fosters a positive and challenging learning environment. I encourage students to take a risk. As a result, my students are interested in pursuing careers in science-related fields. Because my students have found love in science, I am now able to serve as a facilitator in the classroom. Students are making great strides academically.

Describe how you include opportunities for students to develop Social Emotional Learning skills in your instruction.

As an educator, I understand the importance of educating the whole child. By implementing Social-emotional learning, I have noticed the high levels of academic student growth and a decrease in behavioral issues. By incorporating Social-emotional learning into my curriculum, not only benefits my students this academic year but for a lifetime to come.

Many students that are enrolled in my classroom have Behavior Intervention Plans. To ensure their success, I provide them with opportunities to check in daily. Our time together gives me the opportunity to discuss their feelings each day and strategies they can readily use to help improve their emotions. This time with my students allows them to see the importance of building relationships and creates a safe space that's not judgmental.

Additionally, class meetings are important in developing social-emotional learning skills. These meetings are held each Monday. These class meetings are utilized to solve problems that have occurred within the class setting and to plan upcoming class events. As a result of these meetings, a positive classroom climate has been established. Also, during class meetings, students are assigned classroom jobs/responsibilities. By giving all students something to do, this effort assists my students with developing self-worth and demonstrates how each person's role plays an integral part of our classroom community.

Academically, social-emotional learning skills is the driving force of my instruction. Weekly, my students are exposed to group assignments. These type of assignments gives my students to talk and interact collectively about content. By having differences of opinion, my students can display empathy in their conversation. When selecting assignments, I often offer my students choices. Using this approach teaches my students with setting goals and making responsible decisions. This approach gives students autonomy and empowers responsibility. When disagreements occur, my students have been equipped with the importance of viewing things from the perspective of others.

Lastly, SMART Goals is another social-learning skill I utilize to assist my students with maintaining control over things they want to accomplish. SMART Goals focus on things students want to accomplish that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. During data talks, I can review each students' goals

to identify whether their plan of action is working or not. This approach sets the stage for meaningful conversations with beginning with the end in mind.

As a result of promoting social-emotional learning strategies in my classroom, I have noticed fewer behavior problems, high academic performance, my student's positive attitudes toward themselves, others, and their schoolwork. Although these may be short term outcomes, with continued exposure, social-emotional learning skills can promote healthy relationships, engage my students in citizenship, and promote graduation from high school and produce students that are college and career ready.