My first experience was at Manchester High School observing Mr. Jabin Burnworth’s freshman Biology I class. I spent a great deal of time watching and participating in his classroom activities. This was by far the most energetic and engaging classroom that I have ever been a part. The students were focused during lectures and participating during discussion. The only time they had difficulty was paying attention to lab instructions; it seemed that every group had the same questions even after Jabin thoroughly explained the experiment.

After several days of monitoring the class, I had selected a few students that I felt could likely use some assistance in the class. These students were paying attention in class, but they seemed puzzled by some of the information. I’m not sure if it because they didn’t read their assignment, or if it just wasn’t making sense. Mr. Burnworth took the extra time to reiterate important parts of the lesson several times and broke down the information in a way that students could understand it. Jabin selected a student who he thought could use some help with her homework assignments and whose schedule was compatible with my own.

I spent the next class period observing her, noting that she sat quietly in the back row taking notes, but never asking questions or speaking up during class discussions. If she had a question, she tended to ask one of the girls next to her, but never shared her frustrations with the teacher. Her shy, introverted personality kept her thoughts bottled up.

I knew it was going to take some time to get her to open up and talk to me about why she was struggling in Jabin’s class. I broke the ice by talking about the sport’s teams she was involved with (on several occasions I noticed that she wore MHS athletic shirts) and how I used
to play sports in high school as well. I asked her if she was struggling to find time balancing sports and academics and she confessed that this was the majority of her problem. She seemed to be doing alright in her Biology class and she stated that her other classes were going well also, but she needed more time to complete tasks. From this conversation, I decided to try to help her with some time management skills that would be pertinent to survival throughout the remainder of her years in school and allow her to continue participating in athletics.

I was only able to tutor this student for three sessions, but I we were able to accomplish a lot. Focusing on the section assessment (covering the six kingdoms) that she was assigned from her book, I was able to provide helpful hints on searching for answers without thoroughly reading every line of the text. I explained that it is a good idea to read the chapter all the way through before taking an exam, but sometimes it’s just not possible to do it in one night. By skimming through the section with her, I was able to point out that many times science textbooks have headings and bold words that point out the answers to the questions students may be assigned. Searching through the section, we were able to use the hints that I provided to find the answers to the assessment questions in a much shorter time than if she had read the section and then searched for answers. I also explained to her that if she does have time to read the section thoroughly, that it is a good idea to read the questions before diving into the text so that she knows what she is looking for. The skills that she learned today seemed to help her keep up with her assignments and manage her time more smoothly. Mr. Burnworth even noticed an improvement on her turning in assignments on time.

Our second tutoring session was spent reviewing for a chapter test. My goal was to find out what she knew and then focus on the topics that she couldn’t remember. For lack of a better review technique, we used the questions at the end of the chapter and answered them one by one.
If there was a question that the student couldn’t recall the answer to, she looked it up in the chapter to clarify her understanding of the concept. When we were finished reviewing the chapter, I asked her if she had any questions over material that we didn’t cover or any information that she still wasn’t quite sure about. We then reviewed those sections of the text and I did my best to explain them more thoroughly than the book. The next time I saw her, she seemed pleased with the grade that she had received on her exam.

Our third session was interesting to say the least. Mr. Burnworth had created a song for the students to memorize; this song was their final. They needed to recall, line for line, the lyrics to his new hit single “Bacteria Boy.” Okay so maybe it hasn’t been recorded, but the concepts that he incorporated into the song pertained to the information that they had learned in class including microscope use and safety, and oodles of information about the life of a bacteria. By creating a song containing all of the information students needed to know, he was able to reduce students’ anxiety levels. The student I was tutoring was having difficulty trying to memorize the song because she was attempting to cram it all in at once. I taught her to break down the song into smaller chunks, say four lines at a time, and recite it out loud. By hearing and visualizing the material, she was able to learn the words more rapidly. Though the song was silly and nonsensical and the student was slightly embarrassed, we had a fun time learning the song together. In the 45 minutes that we spent breaking down the song and putting it together chunk by chunk, we were able to memorize sequence and the words. With a little bit of fine tuning, she would be able to ace the “exam.”
a) Classroom Rules

Mr. Burnworth’s rules:

All rules set forth in the student handbook are to be obeyed in this classroom. The following rules are specifically for the Biology classroom.

1. Please use common sense in the laboratory.
2. Talking while I am talking is not permitted.
3. Remain in your seat unless you have permission to leave it. (Please sharpen your pencil before class begins)
4. The animals may be touched ONLY with permission.
5. Writing on the desks or lab tables is not permitted. Please treat the furniture with respect. Anyone caught writing or carving into the new desks will receive 1 Friday Night School.
6. Pulling the shower or playing with the eye wash is not allowed. Again, anyone caught disturbing this equipment will receive 1 Friday Night School.
7. The cabinets will not be used as trash receptacles.
8. The prep room may ONLY be entered with my permission.
9. Be in the room when the bell rings. If you are not in the room you will be counted tardy.
10. The greenhouse may be entered with my permission.

CONSEQUENCES

If you choose to disobey the above rules you will first receive a warning. If the behavior has not been corrected after a second warning you will visit Mr. Self. I respect you and I expect you to return that respect.

These rules seem to be stated in a negative manner, but get the point across to students. There are several rules that are common sense, but he takes the time to emphasize them. I like the fact that he clearly states consequences for specific rules with the rule itself, stressing that students had better not break those rules. Further consequences are placed with less emphasis at the end, detailing that there will be not one, but two, warnings before action will be taken. He ends with a strong statement about a respectful relationship with his students which is important to create at the start of the semester/year.

b) Managing Student Work

Mr. Burnworth informed me that student grades are based on tests, quizzes, homework, labs, and special projects that they do throughout the trimester. All homework is to be turned into the bottom tray of his desk before class begins. Assignments are counted late if they are not in the tray at that time to prevent students from completing the assignment during class and turning it in at the end of the period. He asks that students place late assignments or makeup work into the top tray. Jabin accepts late work from students for one day at a grade deduction of 30% and no credit for work that is more than a day late. Students that have been absent are expected to check with friends to find out what they have missed and turn it in on time. They have the number of days they were absent to turn in the work (one day absent= one day to make up). Mr. Burnworth posts students grades, using their book number as identification, on a weekly basis to allow students to closely monitor their own progress and seek help when needed. Jabin keeps a written
gradebook and he also uses a computer program called PowerSchool to keep track of student grades.

Jabin’s grading system seems fairly accurate, though I would probably incorporate some type of daily participation grade to keep students active and involved in the class discussions. His 30% deduction for late work seems steep for freshmen that are transitioning into high school, but it also keeps them from slacking off. We are all human and will forget the occasional assignment, but one assignment shouldn’t affect the overall grade. This system also keeps students from turning everything in at the semester’s end saying that they forgot about it. I would feel the need to remind students at the end of class that I need their assignments by the end of the day if they haven’t already turned them in. I would certainly be less frustrated at trying to keep groups of assignments separate if students got them to me on time and Jabin takes care of this problem by setting high expectations for his students.

c) Classroom Diagram
Diagram is separately placed at back of information packet.
The layout of this science room allows for smooth transition from classroom to lab work by basically separating the two from each other on the floor plan. Resource books, televisions, dry erase boards, and graded homework are all placed around the perimeter of students’ work area. Mr. Burnworth’s large work space at the front of the room allows for easily viewed demonstrations. The only problem that I could see occurring with this classroom is that there is no board to write instructions on in the back of the room. Students must then have lab instructions on paper in front of them instead of on the board.

d) Alternative Grading Policies
As stated earlier, Mr. Burnworth grades his students performances based on tests, quizzes, homework assignments, lab work, and other special projects.

It seems that a lot of teachers place emphasis on test scores, which is not fair to students that know that material but are poor test takers. Teachers are learning to adjust their grading procedures to place less emphasis on tests and more on other assignments and projects. I plan on placing emphasis on several aspects of the class, allowing my students to excel in areas that they are most comfortable. If I have strong art students that are able to portray their knowledge more so through a project than a test, I will consider this when grading them. I will be looking for students to make forward progress in building their knowledge. The more they share this information with me, the more likely they will receive a grade that reflects their growth.

e) Cooperative Groups
Mr. Burnworth incorporates cooperative learning groups into his lessons through the use of lab work. By having students assigned to specific tasks and working towards a common goal, he is able to create an engaging classroom environment. Jabin enjoys incorporating cooperative learning into his lessons, but finds it difficult to do with his larger classes, because they are more difficult to monitor and assist with difficulties.

I believe that it will be difficult to incorporate cooperative learning groups into my lower level classes because there are more students involved. However, through the use of carefully planned
out instructions, these groups should be able to manage their own projects efficiently and grant me more time to view each of the groups’ progress in a timely fashion.

f) Rewards and Punishments
I used to do more with rewards. I feel like high school kids aren’t really motivated by little trinkets and toys. I give extra credit more often. That usually motivates a student who is doing poorly. Punishments are definitely a motivator. We have Friday Night School from 3:15 to 6:15 on Fridays. No one wants that.

g) Special Problems
2. If you know a student is struggling with the text, how do you help him/her?
If students are struggling with the text, I try to read the text out loud to them. You would be surprised how much this helps. Sometimes students are just better auditory learners. Some kids even have an IEP that requires teachers to read the text or even tests to the students.

3. Do you have difficulty making adjustments to meet the needs of "exceptional" learners (students with learning disabilities or Individual Education Plans")?
Personally, I teach to the more accelerated students, but spend more time helping the exceptional learners. In an integrated classroom it’s tough to teach to both. I expect students with an IEP to see me for extra help. Yes, I do give them more encouragement to work to their potential, but I also expect them to take responsibility for their work.

4. Do you differentiate your teaching style or lesson plan for students with learning disabilities or students with other problems?
I may have partially answered this question in the question above. Biology is tough for accelerated and exceptional students. I want to teach biology so that everyone can get it, but I also don’t want to dumb it down too much. I feel bad for the kids who are bored because they aren’t challenged. Every student is challenged by something different of course, but I want my students to learn because there is a spark at some point. I believe enthusiasm can go a long way. Not everyone is going to remember the citric acid cycle, but they may remember something crazy you did to teach the citric acid cycle. If they remember that one crazy thing, then chances are they will remember something about the citric acid cycle. Lectures are necessary, but if you can get the students to DO something, then you’ll have success. This goes for both the accelerated and the exceptional students. Kinesthetic learning is so key.

h) Reflection on experience
My second experience was with a fifth grader at Laketon Elementary. I completed 19 hours of after school tutoring with this student and learned a great deal about younger students. This student required a lot more movement and activity than the high school student that I was working with. He was always willing to complete his homework and study his spelling words, but he did not like to read with me. So as not to be lengthy with the many sessions that were held I will provide a combined summary of the tasks that we completed.

The first and last task that we completed every session was working on the student’s spelling words. We began by copying the words down and rewriting them several times, but this did not appear to help. By reading the words out loud while looking at them, the student was able to use multiple senses to take in the words. I also broke words down into smaller words or chunks allowing the student to be less overwhelmed by a large word. As I read down the list and he spelled or wrote out the words, I would correct him before moving on to the next word or tell him “good job” for spelling the word correctly. If his misspelled a word, we would come back to it after going through the entire list and spell it again. This was done until all of the words were spelled correctly. I explained to the student that repetition was necessary when learning so many new words.

On several occasions we completed math story problems in which the student had to break the problem down into steps toward solving the problem. He struggled to word his statements correctly because he was often unsure of the order to complete the steps. I spent time creating logical sequences and then scrambling them up for the student to place in the correct order. This activity helped him understand the sequence of events that often times occurs in a story problem.
I got several glimpses of history lessons that my fifth grader was learning. From all of the different Native American homes that were displayed throughout the library, I knew that I would be learning something about Indians sooner or later. The student I was tutoring had to read a section of his textbook that described a specific type of Indians and their traditions. He then had to complete a worksheet that asked questions about the information that he had read. I taught the student to look through the text at the bold words and headings on the pages to see clue words that would point him to areas containing the important information that he needed.

The history lessons that we studied also required students to memorize state names, capitals, and locations. I was able to help the student memorize the states through spatial orientation with one another. When learning the 5 Middle Atlantic States we started at the north with New York and worked in a clockwise motion through New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. He was able to relate the state capitals to names (or nicknames) of people he knew and by placing them with the correct state. These memorization tools will continue to help him with memorization in other subjects as well.

The toughest part of this tutoring experience was finding the motivation to get my student to want to read. I tried to let him pick out books from his own library, but he didn’t seem to find anything that he wanted to read. The books that he did find were often too difficult for him and he did not enjoy reading them because he was struggling so much with the content. I was able to search the college library and find several books pertaining to his hobbies of football, baseball, bicycling, and motocross that his enjoyed reading. These books were full of background information that provided me with the knowledge to ask him questions about his experiences with the sports. He seemed to enjoy telling stories about his hobbies and we were finally able to find something that he enjoyed reading and talking about.