Appendix D
Asynchronous Discussions in NiceNet and Except from One Discussion Thread

Join the Discussion!

Threaded discussions between mentor teachers and class members will occur between June 2nd and June 9th. These discussions will focus on the asynchronous observations that will be viewed at your convenience prior the beginning of the discussion period. It became necessary to move away from Moodle in order to facilitate these discussions, however. www.nicenet.org provides an adequate alternative.

Instructions to access nicenet:
1. Go to www.nicenet.org
2. On the right side of the screen click “Join a Class”.
3. Enter the correct key below (you may copy and paste from this document):
   a. Social Studies: [code]
4. Complete the information requested, be sure to include your email address in case we need to send you an off-line message.
5. Once you get to the course homepage (Social Studies Observations), you will see “Conferencing” as an option on the left side of the screen. Select Conferencing and you will see two threads- you may choose either high school or middle school.
6. Read the comments and questions posted by your peers and mentor teachers, join the dialogue!

Take advantage of this opportunity to get to know these teachers, their teaching style, what they believe is pedagogically important, how they use to teach specific topics, and to tap into their overall expertise as experienced social studies teachers to tap into their overall expertise as experienced social studies teachers.
Asynchronous Threaded Discussion Excerpt

FROM: [Graduate Assistant]
SUBJECT: Teaching Bible

[ Mentor Teacher 1]
I really liked your class and learned a lot from how you interacted with students. Have you had students who do not believe Christianity while you teach Bible? Have you had any difficulty to teach them? If you have, how did you handle the difficulties?

FROM: [Mentor Teacher1]
SUBJECT: RE: Teaching Bible

Thanks I do love teenagers and so enjoy teaching them! Yes...I have had a variety of students take Bible from Jewish to Buddhist to Muslim to atheists (this would be the group I have had the most). Since the class is not taught from a religious point of view but more from a historical and cultural view with an emphasis on how the Bible has impacted western culture it really has not been an issue. I have been through quite a bit of legal "training" because of the subject I teach and so am more aware and sensitive to the legal constraints that high school teachers have. No matter what subject you teach you are allowed to EXPOSE but not IMPOSE. For example, I can expose my students to what is in the Bible, to different viewpoints concerning the text but I cannot impose my beliefs or a certain belief on them. I will not share my opinion with a student even if they ask me a question about it. And this is not just a Bible thing it applies to all teachers. Back in the last presidential election there were teachers who got in big trouble for sharing their political views with their classes.

So to get back to your question about difficulties teaching students with diverse beliefs, to be honest with you it is not an issue because of the way I teach it and the opportunity I give the students to ask questions, share their ideas and do research....hard to explain but perhaps this example will help. A couple of years ago at the beginning of the semester when I was explaining to the students how our class would be set up and how I would be teaching the Bible academically and not religiously or devotionally, I had a student say..."So, what you are saying is you are not going to try to cram something down our throats because I hate it when adults try to cram something down your throat. I am only taking the class because my parents made me take it." I told her that I did not like that approach either and that I would be presenting multiple views of things and she could decide for herself what she did with the information. She was happy and so was I! This is truly what we hope for as educators... that students will learn to think for themselves based on the knowledge that they acquire. Hope this helps to answer your question...the bottom line for me as a teacher is respect. It is the key to building a relationship with a student that fosters learning and creates the open and safe environment where people feel comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas and learn from each other.

FROM: [Student 4]
SUBJECT: Signing- Hand Signals

[ Mentor Teacher 1],
Have you always used hand signals? Did you and your class create your own signals or are you using a guide of some sort?

FROM: [Mentor Teacher 1]
SUBJECT: RE: Signing- Hand Signals

[Student 4]
I cannot remember when I have not used hand signals. When I was first getting started teaching there was a teacher who used this as a way of teaching her students key information and things that she wanted them to remember and I saw how effective it was in not only helping them retain information but also in their enjoyment of the learning process. And so I began to add different hand signals to my lessons. Admittedly, it is a little "scary" to begin using in class at first because you have to put yourself out there a bit as a teacher but as the students realize that it works and they get over worrying about their "image" they come to love learning this way.
Most of the hand motions I use I have created but there are times in which I let the students come up with their own and teach them to the class.

In my classes, I have such a variety of learning levels from EC to the top students in their class and I find that this is one method that reaches both ends of the spectrum and in between and pulls us all together as a class. I had an OCS student in my New Testament class this fall that I had 2 years earlier in Old Testament. When we started reviewing the books of the Bible and key outlines from that Old Testament class this young man could recite all of this information as if he had just learned it. He was flawless with his recollection and I was blown away and convinced that this is an effective way to teach all my students!

My philosophy in teaching has always been that I will try anything in class to help my students learn....it doesn't work the worst that happened is that I "lost" a day. Most of the time it does work and they enjoy it and even if it doesn't students appreciate your trying to mix it up....they really appreciate a teacher who wants them to learn and be successful. Sometimes my believing in them turns into their believing in themselves! Hand signals is just one way I seek to accomplish this.