

Strength: More successful intern

Subject: English

Note: Name of intern has been changed.

During her internship, Sue taught in the English Communication Arts Department at a high school, near Lansing. The school is class A with approximately 1000 students. The majority of the student body is European American, with a small but growing African American and Hispanic population. Most of the students come from lower to working class homes. However, there is a very small upper level class of students and some extremely motivated students who are recruited by some of the most prestigious universities. Still, the majority of students go to community colleges.

As the year began, Sue was in a "learning" position with her mentor. She was involved with two general English 10 classes, one of which contained eight special education students mainstreamed into regular education classes; Drama, an elective for juniors and seniors; Media and Society, a senior elective dealing with how the media effects society as well as how to produce legitimate radio shows and videos; and Communication Skills, a 10th and 11th grade English class geared to special needs students. During the second term, Sue was lead teaching in the two English 10 classes and the Communication Skills class. Finally, during the third quarter (10 weeks), Sue was lead teacher for all classes but drama. Her schedule was quite diverse so she had a lot of practice shifting gears from an active project oriented class to a very quiet, "need-your-help-and-more" kind of class.

Sue is an exceptional writer and she uses her knowledge to instruct and encourage young writers. She can look at a lesson and determine where the potential difficulty is for the students and she will then develop strategies to help them build a completed writing *assignment*. During the lesson, she makes adjustments for the diverse learning population, some of whom have great difficulty understanding how to put a paper together as well as those who need advice on more accelerated concepts like developing appropriate thesis statements. Sue uses the students' writings to prompt lessons from the text. She focuses in on their specific writing needs, therefore making the text relevant. Sue also spends a great deal of time working through literature. She worked with students on reading strategies like "chunking and labeling" so they could better understand nonfiction essays. She conducted meaningful discussions and interesting reading reflections after reading class plays and novels. She has learned what it takes to adjust reading expectations for the "mainstreamed" special education students through many trying experiences this year. Because of her background in journalism, she was able to teach concepts of journalism to the senior Media and Society class.

Planning, both long term and short term, is a strong suit for Sue. She considers the department's outcomes and the class objectives and then how to best incorporate those objectives into bite-size pieces that will connect to previous areas of learning. She spent considerable time looking for additional articles and stories to go along with the units that were already part of the curriculum for English 10, in hopes of making the unit more interesting. She has learned to incorporate certain strategies like KWL (What we know; What we want to find out; What we learned) for special learners as she breaks down each major unit. She allows herself room to flex with each short-term assignment so that she can listen to the comments from the students and adjustments in the tasks if necessary. She considers using various types of media to enhance different lessons and will often

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"model" how a speech or a presentation should look to the audience. This has helped set the expectations for the *final* projects.

Her planning is also influenced by her personal reflection on her teaching strategies and how they "worked" or "didn't work" within certain lessons. She is quick to look to herself as the reason various students did not meet certain objectives. She questions her approach/style/techniques and wonders if these things could make a difference in students' success. This then drives her planning, as she digs deeper and consults more resources to find out what techniques would be better to improve students' progress. Sue has stepped out of the classroom to *find* these resources: among others she has worked with the special education department for strategies to use with case load students, and she has collaborated with the librarian to develop a small research project.

Sue keeps a firm handle on her classes. She does not allow the types of remarks that discourage a safe community atmosphere. If one gets out of line, she will deal with that student personally. At the beginning of the second semester, when she was sent several discontented "attitudes" she organized several group activities that encouraged discussion and performance by all in the class. This was a great ice-breaker that was essential for all students to be able to even talk aloud with others in that class. Sue will move the classroom arrangement when possible to discourage cliques and to encourage comfort levels between all students. She is not afraid to discipline those who are out of order. If there is a problem, she deals with it in a timely fashion. Groups and/or partners sharing thoughts and ideas are commonplace in Sue's class; consequently, her time management has become quite efficient in order to move groups from one activity to another smoothly.

When Sue facilitates discussions and critiques, she has developed exemplary skills in listening and assessing comments so she can extract more information. She uses techniques that put the burden of explanation on the student. They have to think it through and respond. Her assignments include activities that allow students the opportunity to share information.

She moves around the room to be sure all are working. She works one on one for those who need help. I have never seen Sue at the teacher's desk working on something else. She is always around the kids assessing their understanding. Sue tries to engage even the students who have given up on themselves. She continues to let them know each assignment is new and can be completed and will make an impression on their grade.

Sue is a consummate professional! Her attire is appropriate, she is always on time, her lessons are prepared, she attends school functions, and she deals with her students in a respectful manner. . . even when they may not deserve it. She enforces school rules and makes the appropriate inquiries if she does not know something, and she has always been aware that these students are not her buddies; she has never tried to encourage that type of relationship. Sue has been conscientious about reading journals and articles that touch on education's current thinking about students and learning and the challenges educators face.

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Sue has needed to wear several hats this year; she was a student teacher, a graduate student taking courses at MSU, a prospective employee concerned with portfolios and resumes, a real teacher to the students and a team player with me. She moved through these various roles with ease. She did not get discouraged with all the work she was expected to complete. Instead, she took action and fulfilled all of her roles. In fact, she voluntarily added to her responsibilities by assisting with the fall play.

Finally, as I look at this upcoming teacher, I see a young woman who has polished many teaching strategies and will incorporate them into any classroom. Her ability to involve all students, check for comprehension, and assess students' understanding as she goes along are teaching tools that all teachers need in order to be successful in today's classrooms. She has a strong disposition for reflecting on her teaching. I am sure throughout her teaching career she will continue to learn as she seeks out new knowledge through reading and reflection. Sue will prove a welcome addition to any English faculty.

Jane does an excellent job in her planning of units. She carefully considers what she wants to teach and knows her objectives. Of her many strengths, the one I was most impressed with was her ability to adapt to unexpected changes in plans. In teaching we are often faced with unplanned assemblies and interruptions. Jane is able to "go with the flow" and adjust her schedule to accommodate unexpected interruptions. Jane is able to look at what she taught and reflect on what didn't work and what did. She is always willing to accept advice on plans and ask for help when necessary. I feel she is growing in her teaching and will continue to grow. She does not see herself as a "failure" if something does not work, but instead moves on to make changes for improvement. Jane has learned to change plans from one hour to the next and will adapt her plans if needed.

As we all know, classroom management is difficult, and Jane is trying to find what works best for her. She discovered right from the start that ninth grade students are somewhat difficult to handle. At first I was concerned because of the students behavior in the classes; however, she tightened up her discipline strategies. At the beginning she had trouble deciding on the best ways of handling difficult students; however, she has learned from her mistakes. Jane has had to adapt her classroom management strategies quite a few times, however with each modification classroom management skills improved. Jane has successfully implemented several intervention strategies such as calling home, and asking students to leave the classroom when their behavior impeded the learning of other students. It takes time to find a strategy that works best for a teacher, and Jane is well on her way to developing a repertoire of effective management strategies.

Jane has a very nice rapport with the students. They seem comfortable with her and willingly go to her for help. She is continually monitoring their progress and keeps up with the assignments. She is a very caring individual and the students can see that. They know they can receive help when it is needed. This is particularly evident in her first hour class (Study Skills), in which she helps the students with their English and math. Jane monitors the students during her lessons. She often walks around the room and checks their progress, and she is aware if a student has some difficulty. She makes herself available for help, either at lunch or during first hour.

Jane sincerely cares for the young people that she taught and would try to make an impact on every one of them. She tried desperately to help a few students who were struggling, but unfortunately these students seemed to just not care. At first this was difficult for her to accept, however she has become aware of the fact that we cannot "save" all of our students. There are quite a few students who she has genuinely helped and has made an impact on their lives. These students will never forget her.