

## **Mrs. Helzer's Teaching Philosophy**

“Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.” –Chinese Proverb

“We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it then we do from learning the answer itself.” –Lloyd Alexander

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Based on my educational experiences and the research I have done on student learning, I feel that students learn best when the classroom is centered on them and their needs. From my time in education, I've gathered that many students feel as though school is done to them, not something they are a part of. When we shift the focus of the classroom from a traditional approach to a more modern approach, students can begin to feel as though they are a part of school, and then authentic learning can take place.

In my classes I have one overall goal: that students are engaged in authentic learning. I am not as concerned with the simple regurgitation of facts as an indicator of learning as I am with how students relate what they learn in English class to their own lives. When students can apply what they have learned, then I feel as though students have truly learned. To accomplish my goal I will create a community in each of my classes by incorporating a few physical classroom changes. First, I will utilize a “Wall of Fame” that recognizes students for displays of good character. Not only does this give students a chance to be in the spotlight for accomplishments done off the court, field, or stage, it also encourages me to focus on finding the good in students. I have also decided to incorporate a “Graffiti Board” that gives students a place to record their thoughts, bring in outside photos, quotes, song lyrics, doodles, etc. My hope is that this will encourage students to take ownership of the classroom and feel as though they are a part of our class. As for instructional strategies, I will implement a variety of strategies in my classes that are research based:

1. Cooperative learning- Different from group work, cooperative learning activities are designed to require equal participation and call for students to work cooperatively so that one student alone cannot complete the particular task. As a teaching strategy, cooperative learning allows the teacher to step back and places the students in the driver's seat. The teacher becomes a facilitator as students work cooperatively to accomplish a task. Cooperative learning is process oriented and teaches students (among the content) social and leadership skills, while at the same time increasing self-esteem, motivation, and an overall liking for class (Kagan).
2. Critical thinking- Unfortunately, many high school students are unaccustomed to thinking critically in their classes, to taking an active role in their learning. In my classes students will be encouraged to think about what they are learning; I plan on challenging students to think about literature by incorporating a variety of supplemental readings, media, and applicable assignments that push them to think

critically beyond the classroom texts and into their own lives and belief systems. Critical thinking encourages the development of both literacy and writing skills that are necessary for success in life after high school (Borsheim and Petrone).

3. Social action- Using social action alongside the “normal curriculum” can be the ticket to motivating student writers. When students are placed in the driver’s seat to work towards bettering their community or solving a problem that is of concern to them, then we will have authentic learning taking place. Working towards a product they are invested in gives students purpose (Berdan).

4. Incorporation of technology- There is no avoiding it, we live in a digital world. More of our daily tasks and interactions are becoming digital; therefore students need to be prepared to use these digital tools responsibly. To embrace digital learning in my classroom I will utilize a variety of technologies: blogs, forums, electronic whiteboards, and a variety of tech-friendly projects. Research has proven that incorporating the appropriate technologies alongside our writing curricula can help improve students' writing abilities (Herrington, et al.).

It is my desire to provide OHS students with a well-rounded English curriculum that provides students with the best opportunities for learning. Should you have any questions throughout the school year, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to a great year!

Thank you,

Danielle Helzer  
Ogallala High School  
Language Arts Instructor  
308-284-4029

### **Resources Used**

Berdan, Kristina [et al.]. National Writing Project. Writing for a Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning Through Social Action. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA. 2008.

Borsheim, Carlin and Robert Petrone. “It just seems to be more intelligent’: Critical Literacy in the English Classroom.” Critical Literacy as a Resistance. Peter Lang: New York. 2008.

Herrington, Anne, Kevin Hodgson, and Charles Moran, ed. Teaching The New Writing: Technology, Change, and Assessment in the 21st Century Classroom. The National Writing Project: Berkley, CA and Teachers College Press: New York. 2009.

Kagan, Spencer Dr. Cooperative Learning. Kagan Cooperative Learning: San Clemente, CA. 1994, 2009.

