

Topic: Preparing the Student

Speakers: Professor Molly Ware (Woodring) and Cathy Jo Fisher (Shuksan Middle School)

Travis Tennesen – Introduction

- Think of two radically different students you've encountered in the educational setting. As we discuss 'preparing students' keep in mind that students are not a uniform bunch.

Shuksan Middle School – Woodring partnership background

- Molly and CJ have worked together for six years and over that time have grown and developed how they prepare students.
- CJ is a 7th grade teacher at Shuksan Middle School, a school where 70% of the student population qualifies for free and reduced lunches. The school faces poverty issues. Multiple languages are spoken at the school.
- Molly's course prepares teacher candidates. She is committed to creating opportunities for her students to "bump into" different populations.
- One of Molly's objectives is to teach her students to be *responsive educators rather than reactive*.

Their first partnership experience

Initially, preparing both sets of students was less intentional. All 15 WWU students showed up to CJ's class on a single day and started working with the middle schoolers. One Western student commented that it felt like an "alien invasion."

This first experience shifted how Western and Shuksan students were introduced to one another. Now Western students start with a tour of the school and are introduced by CJ to build trust and respect. An assessment of the Shuksan students found that they want and need to experience a college campus so WWU now hosts a day on campus for them.

Better Preparing Western students

- *Structure*. Molly uses an activity that asks students to identify structures that are in place for both traditional and more complex learning environments. Identifying a structure in a more inquiry-based environment is like giving students a "hook to hang their hat on" allowing them to engage in a complex setting.
- *Recognizing different student experiences*. Molly notes that the way Western students are prepared looks different. WWU students with diverse backgrounds know how to

navigate complex situations. However, she is challenged by the question of how they bring their identity to the public school space. CJ notes that the diversity in teacher candidates must reflect the population they will serve/work with.

- *Safe learning environment.* Molly has worked to help students feel comfortable with ambiguity in their community engagement experiences. She learned that she must be a “cheerleader” for the students, rather than cautioning against their actions. She creates an environment where it’s okay to experiment and take risks. She tries to reduce fear around doing the wrong thing with the middle schoolers.
- *Proving a framework.* She implements an exercise to orient students outside of the Western framework (handout) and encourages a growth rather than fixed mindset. It’s important to recognize that they’re stepping into a foreign cultural world and provide space for students to ‘see’ that world they’re stepping into.
- *Feedback for students.* The structure includes a tight feedback loop where students receive observations and written feedback from the Shuksan teacher and their professor. It’s important to sometimes explicitly point out or identify learning moments for Western students.

What does the partnership look like today?

Molly’s course is offered two consecutive quarters. There are two teacher candidates for every six to eight middle schoolers. Western students work in an AVID classroom to help middle schoolers work toward their culminating projects. This setting is preferred over a traditional classroom setting where the teacher has more rigid content to adhere to. It is less stressful for the Shuksan teacher and provides Western students practice becoming responsive teachers rather than having a content-focused experience.