



Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy®
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In January of this year, I served as faculty moderator for a five-day Intersession course on economics, taught by Clair Null, an alumna of this institution. I spent every day in Clair's class, and spoke with her after each, as she reflected on her instructional goals and implementation.

Having served for six years as the CEO of a teacher preparation foundation, I have a wide experience of pre-service teachers and have seen many of them at work in a variety of classroom situations. Thus, I can state with confidence that Clair has the full spectrum of the excellent teacher's instincts, resilience, intelligence and organizational skill.

The first element of her skillset to impress me was the fact that, in spite of being some years removed from the high school scene, Clair accurately recalled, and planned for, the adolescent mind. The topics, the level of discourse, and the systematic approach were aligned precisely with the students' interests, culture and capacities.

The second element was perhaps the most impressive—Clair had prepared well in advance, consulting with me regularly for several months; nonetheless, is she perceived that another curricular approach or classroom activity would be more in students' interest, she adapted or changed her material, quite literally overnight. This flexibility in placing the student at the center of a teacher's practice, while utterly logical, is too rare.

The third element reflects Clair's imagination, which will be true gift to students in her classes. To find and/or create a series of engaging activities, age-appropriate, customized to students who, while all gifted, may not have equal backgrounds in economics, real-world, team-based, deeply engaging and just plain fun would be a great deal to expect from a veteran. Clair carried it off with panache. The students still talk about a reading and discussion on the question: Does participating in the Hajj change race relations?

In spite of the fact that this mini-course is only five days long, Clair nonetheless planned and facilitated a final project in which student teams researched, organized their data, came to consensus on conclusions, and then presented (to not only the class, but to our president and principal as well, just to raise the stakes a bit) on a topic of great relevance to our school at this moment: the effects, positive and negative, of our new policy that every student have a tablet computer.

I have monitored many Intersessions here, and this was by far the best, in thoughtful planning, flexible execution, and really astounding levels of student engagement. Clair will make valuable contributions, even in her first year, to whatever faculty is fortunate enough to engage her.

Yours truly,
Margaret T. Cain
English Faculty