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## **And You Wonder Why I Drink . . .**

### **My Vexation**

Being relatively new to the preservice teacher education game, I would have to say this last year has been a learning experience. After teaching secondary science methods for two years at one university, I moved institutions and began teaching elementary science methods. I had worked with elementary inservice teachers before and knew of the many issues that face them in the classroom on a daily basis. No one though, had prepared me for elementary preservice teachers.

My students are not the traditional 21 year-olds in college. They all transfer from community colleges. They are in their late 20s, 30s, 40s and even 50s. Many work full time jobs, are responsible for the children and spouses, and are about to become the first college graduate in their family. I really do admire them for all they are juggling. Even with that said, they have driven me to one or two (or three) cocktails over the last year.

I have two vexations in regard to my students. The first is their inability to follow directions or think for themselves. I have a pretty detailed syllabus with just about everything they could possibly need in there. I also post all the class assignments, handouts, rubrics, the syllabus and power points on the class website. I receive emails daily about due dates for assignments, questions about policies, etc. It gets very tiresome keeping up with their lack of problem solving. For example, one student replied to an email I sent, asking me where my office was located. I have that in my signature line of my emails and it is also on the syllabus. Another student emailed asking if we had a final in the class. Just 24 hours before I received the email, I had passed out a review for the final and spent the first part of class going over the final. I know it is easier for them to email me and ask rather than look up the information. There is a point though, where it is just too much and I try very hard not to be sarcastic in my responses to them.

My second vexation has to do with the attitude of my elementary preservice students. There is an air of entitlement when they approach me about assignments, due dates and classroom policies. They feel like the rules do not apply to them and I should make exceptions for their personal situations. They get upset when points are deducted from an assignment when they clearly did not follow directions or look at the assignment rubric (handed out with the assignment) when they completed the assignment. I provide them with an opportunity to show me where they met a certain criteria where they lost points and they usually cannot. One student told me she should have received full credit just because she completed the assignment, no matter if it was done incorrectly. In a separate instance, a student emailed me and requested that I put "Important" in the subject line of any emails I send out. "I receive a lot of junk mail and it would help me to know if what you send out is something I need to look at." I usually send at least one email to my students a week, usually dealing with a professional development opportunity, a website for free stuff or to give them an update about class. Not so many emails that one would consider it spam. I called a colleague when I received that email. We were both amazed at the gall of the student and wondered what would have happened if we ever emailed something like that to one of our professors.

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What are the implications to these vexations? I feel part of my job is to help my students begin the transition from student to professional teacher. Some of my colleagues say I am too strict because I hold my students accountable for deadlines and for having a tough attendance policy. Principals are sticklers for deadlines and are not so forgiving if you “forget” to turn in your grades or complete paperwork properly. If my students do not learn how to balance their home life with school, how are they going to balance it when they begin teaching? Are they going to survive? What is going to happen to the students they teach? These questions concern me and make me wonder, is it just something that is happening here at my institution or do others face the same thing?

### **My Venture**

I joke that drinking has become my course of action in dealing with my preservice elementary teachers. Truth be told, I have been a “good” new faculty member and discussed the situation with colleagues. The adjunct science education faculty tell me they face similar situations with their students and are just as frustrated as I am. After talking to some of the “seasoned” general education faculty members, I get the feeling they are not concerned with the lack of effort by our students. I was told by one that “it’s just our students” and I should “get used to it”.

It is not in my nature to just “accept” things and this is why my situation bothers me. At first I thought about having them do a scavenger hunt assignment where they had to locate my office, call me on my office line and send me an email. I know that sounds simplistic or silly to do but I have some that don’t even know my name so this would be a challenge for them. I also asked myself if it would be worth the extra work to my schedule keeping track of who has called, emailed, etc. I have incorporated some new strategies in my class this semester to see if it will help. In addition to going over assignments in class (with more details written out in the instructions), and posting the assignment handout on our class webpage, I am sending out detailed emails with the assignment handout attached. I question myself and wonder if providing them all this information is enabling their lack of thinking for themselves or will help model what they should do for their students.

Other than those listed above, I am not for sure how I should approach my students. The main reason I am submitting this topic to the Crossroads conference is to see if this is happening at other institutions and hopefully gain some insights into how I can help my students become independent thinkers. I spend a lot of time in class going over assignments, expectations, etc. It takes away from the actual teaching of science methods to my students. I want to help them develop problem solving skills but I always thought that would be related to science and teaching, not their own personal life. Maybe I can find some possible solutions to try out and cut my alcohol intake this year.