Interview Questions - Part I, Engagement Through Instruction
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As you start to prepare for an important interview, take your time and thoughtfully consider questions that you may be asked.

To help get your head in the right "space," here are some questions regarding your ability to engage students and lead instruction. While suggestions are listed for formulating your response, ultimately the answer will be uniquely yours. Stay focused, positive, and honest. Try to avoid vague or ambiguous responses. Ideally, you should substantiate your answer with solid examples whenever possible.

Since there will never be just one "right answer" and each person has unique circumstances, prepare your answers and/or comments as they pertain to you and your experiences. These notes will prove useful when you do a run-through or practice interview with a friend or colleague.

Describe what a typical lesson looks like.
- Discuss the purpose of an anticipatory set and closing activities.
- Define clear objectives and give examples describing how you teach to various learning styles using real-world connections.
- Discuss the importance and your implementation of individualized instruction.
- Show the importance of resources being well organized and available.
- Discuss how you engage students in meaningful lessons.
- Give examples of how you check for understanding during lessons.
- Talk about how homework is assigned and how it will be evaluated.

Describe a skill in your curriculum area in which students often struggle. How do you overcome those challenges?
- Explain the skill and why it is a difficult skill for students to understand.
- Discuss how you teach the skill engaging different learning styles, making real-world connections and checking for understanding regularly.
- Discuss only best practices and strategies.

In what ways can a teacher connect more effectively with a student through multicultural awareness?
- Demonstrate the importance of understanding the individuality of children.
- Demonstrate an understanding that cultural context is a factor in student learning.
- Cite examples of how you build relationships with students from various backgrounds.

What kinds of multicultural activities promote tolerance and diversity in your classroom?
- Show an understanding that tolerance and diversity are not only demonstrated through activities but through climate and behaviors as well.
- Cite examples of activities that you have taught in your classroom that teach about cultures and regions.
- Discuss opportunities in your classroom that you use to embrace other cultures.
- Demonstrate "naturalness" of this process, i.e., gestures, body language, tone, etc.
In order to enhance your curriculum, list examples of enrichment activities you use in the classroom.

- Demonstrate your understanding that this is not about EXTRA work. This is about building on already mastered skills through enrichment activities.
- Cite examples that prove depth of learning in activities you use/have used.

Through questioning, how do you increase depth in learning?

- Discuss your use of higher-level questioning. Cite examples.
- Discuss how you respond to incorrect answers. For example, if a student answers a question incorrectly, do you help the student discover the answer by asking probing questions?
- Talk about the need for "wait time" and individualized questions for students.
- Discuss the importance of asking a variety of closed- and open-ended questions as appropriate.
- Demonstrate the importance of building on answers that lead to higher-level questions.

Describe your most successful unit and why.

- The interviewer does not want to hear about the unit you love to teach, necessarily. The interviewer wants to hear about the unit that achieves the best outcomes and meets curriculum standards.
- Give an example of a challenging unit to show your expertise.
- Talk about what makes your unit so engaging.

Explain what differentiation looks like in your classroom.

- Provide a clear definition illustrating your complete understanding of differentiation
- Discuss ways that you have met the needs of a range of learners.
- Give examples of how you engage all students to ensure that no child is anonymous, i.e., individualized instruction, modified assessments, etc.

Convince me that you are an innovative classroom teacher.

- Discuss how you keep up with latest trends and developments in your curriculum area.
- Demonstrate that you are a critical thinker and leader.
  Demonstrate that you never teach the same lesson or unit twice. Reflection is a valued characteristic.
- Talk about how you collaborate with your colleagues to provide challenging ideas and concepts.
- Stress that your innovative ideas enhance mastery of curriculum; they are not a distraction from it.

How do you communicate learning objectives with students?

- Discuss how you develop objectives that are driven by curriculum and give examples of how the objectives are communicated to students and parents.
- Talk about different ideas you implement in your classroom to ensure that objectives are meaningful to students, i.e., students understand the purpose of the lesson, students create their own objectives, etc.
- Cite examples of how you assess that objectives were mastered.
- Provide details about what mastery of an objective looks like.

How do you monitor authentic engagement in your classroom?

- Provide specific examples of how you monitor this.
- Demonstrate the importance of proximity, asking questions, checking for understanding, assessing quality of work, providing individualized attention and instruction, etc.

How do you make real-world connections in your subject area?

- Discuss how you involve students and community in the planning.
- Talk about how you refresh each lesson and unit regularly.
- Give examples of your use of technology and other resources.
- Cite examples of how you connect lessons to the real world, i.e., guest speakers, real-world problem solving, etc.
How do you transition from one activity to the next?

- Stress that your methods focus on the least amount of lost instructional time.
- Demonstrate the need to keep students engaged during transitions.
- Demonstrate knowledge that planning should allow transitions to happen in a natural way.

Describe the key characteristics of a highly-effective classroom environment.

- Show the importance of highly-engaged students, quality instruction and using a wide range of learning styles to reach all learners.
- Illustrate the importance of student work displayed in the classroom.
- Demonstrate understanding that a safe learning environment where students can take risks must be fostered.
- Demonstrate the importance of teacher and students modeling respect.
- Reflect on your own classroom and the things that make it highly effective.

Part II, Professional Educator
Shanna Mack, Co-Founder and Director, Global Services in Education, Ltd. June 10, 2013

Last week, I outlined interview questions and tips related to instruction. This week, we'll look at interview questions related to being an effective professional educator.

Remember: While I've listed suggestions for how to formulate your response, ultimately the answer will be uniquely yours. Stay focused, positive, and honest. Try to avoid vague or ambiguous responses. Ideally, you should substantiate your answer with solid examples whenever possible.

What would your current supervisor say about you?

- Be aware! The interviewer may choose to call your current (or past) supervisor and ask them this same question.
- Be honest but only focus on the positive comments that your current supervisor would share.
- Discuss not only positive attributes that your current supervisor may share, but also discuss positive ways you have contributed to the school and its educational programs.

Describe the qualities of a highly-effective teacher.

- Share qualities that are broad in range, i.e., depth of knowledge of content area, knowledge of how to teach to a variety of learning styles, ability to deliver engaging lessons, ability to organize subject matter in an accessible manner, ability to motivate students, strong and effective communication skills, highly effective student management, etc.
- Connect these qualities to your own attributes and discuss how they make you a highly-effective teacher.

What is the best decision you have ever made?

- The interviewer is looking to see where your values and judgment lie.
- Choose a positive career decision or a life decision that brought new opportunities to you.
- Discuss how you went about making the decision and what specifically qualified it as the “best decision.”

Why did you decide to become a teacher?

- Be honest and reflective in your answer.
- Demonstrate focus on students, learning, achievement and goals of education.
- Consider your strengths and skills that match the profile of a high-quality educator.
Why are you the most qualified applicant for this position?
• Connect your strengths with the school's needs, focus and vision.
• Highlight your accomplishments and what your programs and ideas can bring to the school.
• Show how you can increase student achievement and levels of student engagement.
• Discuss innovative and creative ideas you have implemented in the past.

Have you ever been fired or asked to leave a position?
• Be honest. This is something the interviewer can easily find out for him/herself.
• Focus on what you learned from the situation and how you moved forward.
• Don't use the word "fired" in your explanation. Use a word like "dismissed" that has a less negative connotation.
• Don't assign blame and don't go into a lot of detail.
• Focus on positive lessons and opportunities that were in relation to the dismissal.

Success in school is proven to be influenced by a child's physical, social and educational environment. How do these possible contributors influence your classroom?
• Demonstrate an understanding of both positive and negative influences that students face.
• Discuss how you assess students' individual backgrounds.
• Demonstrate how you turn these challenges into opportunities.
• Cite specific examples that illustrate how you have overcome these challenges.
• Demonstrate your understanding of how students learn and excel.

Describe the key characteristics of what you consider to be an ideal school.
• The interviewer is identifying what things are important to you and if you are a good “fit” for the new school.
• The interviewer is also identifying what you will contribute to the whole-school vision based on the characteristics that are important to you.
• Share a broad range of characteristics, i.e., morale, student involvement, school climate and culture, leadership style, curriculum model, collaboration, focus on achievement, etc.
• Connect your own characteristics with that of your ideal school and identify how you contribute to the overall school environment.

What is your favorite aspect of teaching?
• Be thoughtful and honest in your answer.
• Reflect on your past teaching experiences and the things that excite you.
• Focus should be on students, learning outcomes, achievement and subject matter.

Part III, Professional Educator
Shanna Mack, Co-Founder and Director, Global Services in Education, Ltd. June 20, 2013

This concludes a 3-part aae.org series outlining typical interview questions and tips to consider when preparing a response. Remember: While I've listed suggestions for how to formulate your response, ultimately the answer will be uniquely yours. Stay focused, positive, and honest. Try to avoid vague or ambiguous responses. Ideally, you should substantiate your answer with solid examples whenever possible.

List three adjectives that best describe you professionally.
• The interviewer will be trying to gain insight about what makes you unique.
• Use adjectives that focus on professional priorities, relationships and your personality.
• Consider how colleagues, supervisors, students and parents would describe you. From there, choose the three most comprehensive adjectives.
How would your colleagues describe you professionally?
- The interviewer is looking to see if you can objectively evaluate your own performance and reflect on how others may see you.
- Demonstrate that you are self-aware and reflective in your answer.
Reflect on your own strengths and the positive things you have contributed to your current school and teaching department.

**Identify three significant challenges that educators face today.**
- The interviewer wants to know that you are insightful and are aware of current events and challenges.
- Be constructive and not negative.
- Identify the challenges and explain that you have the capacity to overcome them.
- Describe what you are already doing to overcome these challenges.

**Identify the people that have most influenced your professional life.**
- The interviewer wants to know that you learn from others and seek out mentors.
- The interviewer will also want to gain insight as to what is important to you.
- Think about people in both your personal and professional life that have influenced you professionally.
- Discuss what traits made them so influential and how you've implemented what you've learned from them.

**Tell me about the last time you laughed at school.**
- The interviewer wants to know that you don't take yourself too seriously and that you smile at work and you enjoy what you do.
- The interviewer also wants to know that you will contribute positively to school morale.
- Try to connect with your interviewer with a story that makes him/her smile.

**If you had been in charge of your last work place, what changes would you have made and why?**
- Demonstrate a positive attitude.
- Illuminate your leadership skills and innovative problem-solving skills.
- Reflect on student outcomes and student achievement as a possible place to begin changes.
- Provide an example of an already good idea in place that you could improve. This will prevent your answer from sounding negative.

**Name three tangible and significant contributions you made to your former work place.**
- The interviewer wants to know that you are innovative and you can make positive contributions to your workplace.
- Describe examples that either directly or indirectly improved student outcomes.
- Choose examples that are relevant for your new workplace.
- Give details explaining how you implemented the changes and what made them successful.
Describe the characteristics of students you like to teach.
- The interviewer wants to know that you don't have a narrow vision of what types of students you like to teach.
- The interviewer wants to know that you embrace all students equally.
- Use this as an opportunity to explain your philosophy on motivating reluctant learners, engaging students, etc.

Identify your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.
- Describe your strengths first and do so confidently. Do not be shy! This is your chance to brag about yourself.
- Include at least three strengths.
- Focus on strengths that complement the position and the school in which you are applying.
- The interviewer wants an honest, reflective answer identifying your weaknesses, but they do not want to hear a laundry list of barriers that will prevent them from hiring you. Reframe this part of the question as a "priority for personal development" or an "area of improvement."
- Focus on just one "area of improvement" and describe what steps you have already taken to grow and advance in this area.