

The role of schools today is to produce young adults who are prepared for all aspects of life, not only in their professional jobs, but also as a friend, family member and citizen of their country of choice. To this end teachers should be ready to use any teachable moment to encourage students to make good decisions and develop healthy attitudes about other people and experiences. Of course, the basics cannot be forgotten – reading, writing, math, sciences, and history. These disciplines give students opportunity to expand their knowledge and practice critical thinking skills to make decisions and analyze different points of view.

As technology has increased dramatically in the last several decades, teachers are no longer the repositories of all knowledge. There is now the World Wide Web, as well as computer programs and the ever reliable printed resources found in libraries all over the world. We should not limit our students' knowledge to only what we know, but expect and encourage students to research and seek for more information than we can give them. This changes our role from teacher to facilitator or mediator. We should show our students how to find answers to the difficult questions and then make judgments about what to accept and what to deny as truth. We should be so excited about teaching that we infect our students with that passion and create a generation of life-long learners who are never satisfied with what they know or can do but continually strive for more progress and success.

Students learn best when they are allowed to help direct their learning. If they are asking the questions and finding the answers, they are committed to the process and intrinsically motivated to do more than a teacher might expect them to. Knowing this, I try to incorporate activities and projects that use this philosophy. I have created six webquests that present students with a problem or scenario that they have to solve, but they can pick their own roles based on their interests. I use a site called TrackStar that enables me to use several different websites to present a problem and guide students to the answers with worksheets or projects. I encourage outside work by giving students the responsibility of answering their own questions asked during class by researching it and typing up a short paper for extra credit.

I also understand how frustrated students can be when they don't understand what is expected of them. Students have enough stress in their life without my class adding to it. I use Quia to maintain a class website that lists all due dates and assignments coming up, as well as review games for tests. Through Quia, I can upload copies of assignments or PowerPoints, so that if a student loses what they received in class, they can go to Quia and download and print the information they need. This way they never have to sit at home the night before an assignment is

due with questions. I have also created several scavenger hunts that use websites that show the history of lab procedures and animations for hard-to-understand concepts and processes. These are posted online so students can go back and review them whenever they are studying for tests.

I have taught three subjects, biology, physical science, and English. As a physical science teacher, I laugh when students complain that they are not in math class when I try to teach them mathematical equations to help solve physics problems. To help with this, I try to demonstrate as many ways as possible that science and math are interrelated and dependent on each other. I use websites that show the mathematical reasoning behind the scientific theories they are learning about. I remind them of what they have learned in their math class and help them to see how that can be applied in science class, making connections in their brains that will strengthen their understanding of both subjects.

As an English and science teacher, I am amused when students are upset that I grade them on grammar for lab reports and other papers. People need to be able to communicate to other people. Even if it is through technology (text messages, instant messaging, or emails), the receiver must be able to understand what the speaker is trying to say in their messages. I try to remind them that if they can't read or write, it doesn't matter what they do, they will not succeed!

My biggest challenge is staying organized and up-to-date throughout the school year. I can begin the year being prepared for lessons up to three weeks away and grading papers with a turn-around time of only a couple of days. However, when I hit one major holiday or personal event, it all seems to fall apart around me. I have developed several techniques that help in this area, though I know I am still learning and adjusting to find the best way to manage my classroom. I have set up an area for students to pick up missed work when they are absent and an area for them to turn in work so I don't lose their papers. I write the due dates of assignments and tests on the board so as students walk in to class they can remind themselves what is due when as well as having the information on the website. Hopefully, as I gain experience, I can keep up with what works for me and learn more tricks to stay organized so I am prepared to effectively teach my students when class begins.

Several years ago I read a book by Dr. Bruce Wilkinson, The Seven Laws of the Learner. The one thing I remember from that book was the idea that learning is 100% the responsibility of the teacher, as well as 100% the responsibility of the student. I still believe that to be true...now it's just putting it into practice that gets tricky!