

Realizing a Teaching and Learning Dream

by Nancy Knowlton

Ask a group of teachers why they chose their profession, and the answer that you will most often hear is about making a difference in the lives of children. Most often, teachers were good students themselves, and they want nothing more than to impart the same love for learning that they felt when they were students. Teachers tell us that they want to help all students fulfill their potential – they want to bring to life a child's hopes, dreams and aspirations through education.

Education is the one thing that can overcome the reality of one's socioeconomic status. Education in the twenty-first century is about allowing all children to carve out their own futures through a combination of natural abilities and hard work. Most teachers express a strong desire to help their students in that experience.



However, all too often teachers are dropping out of the profession early in their careers, typically within the first five years. What is it about teaching that is not keeping teachers engaged, even after they have been well educated and well prepared for the challenges and responsibilities of a classroom?

Disillusionment

Many teachers talk about the realities of teaching being dramatically different than what they expected. Students who don't pay attention or who clearly don't want to be in class ruin the daily experience for teachers as well as classmates.

These new teachers, who are so intrinsically motivated, often face students who neither enjoy being in class nor see any point to working hard. There is nothing motivational or enjoyable for many of these teachers in their daily interactions with students. There is no love of learning evident in their young charges, and consequently many teachers feel that their efforts are underappreciated or futile – or both.

Reaching Young Learners

In class after class where SMART products are introduced, teachers talk about a transformation that takes place. Learners who were indifferent or uninterested in daily activities suddenly become engaged and involved.

They seem to have a new passion for learning. They attend class and pay attention. They participate and talk about the active engagement that they feel in the classroom, and the enjoyment they get from learning in a visual way that speaks to their learning style and allows them to express their interest in learning.

Veteran Teachers

It is not just young teachers who appreciate the potential of technology in education. I often hear about veteran teachers who get their second wind as they see their students come alive in technology-enabled environments. These teachers talk about extending their careers to the maximum retirement age. They see the love of learning come alive in their young charges, which in turn energizes them.

It is wrong to assume that veteran teachers are technophobic or averse to learning new things. Very often it is this group of teachers leading the technology charge in their schools and districts.

Strategies

Many teachers today need to develop new strategies to assist them in using technology to reach their teaching and learning objectives. Yes, the actual skilled use of the various technology products is something that they must learn, but far more important are the strategies around the best use of the various products. How does one structure a collaborative project for today's students? How does the use of classroom technology impact group work?

Learning From and Supporting Each Other

Teachers will tell you that teaching is a lonely profession. While they are surrounded by their students each day, they need interaction with colleagues to build their knowledge, skills and confidence. An active professional learning community is one way that teachers can meet their own learning needs.

An Appropriate Role

Technology-enabled learning is not about the technology, but rather the use of technology products to further learning. Putting appropriate technology products into the classroom can motivate and energize both teachers and learners. It is important to recognize that it is not just students who can benefit. With motivated, attentive, engaged students, teachers can realize their own aspirations and dreams.

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