

Real Life Teaching for Real Life Students

A continuation of “Advanced Concepts for a Better Future”

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The three goals that teachers have been directed to strive for are: 1) Develop better ways to engage students. 2) Reduce behavioral challenges. 3) Increase test scores. These goals however are not what teachers had in mind when they decided to become teachers. As teachers, we have bigger dreams for ourselves and for our students. These dreams include delivering compassionate teaching methods that will produce happy students with a love of learning. How can we get back on track? How do we make change to what is expected of teachers? The first step to recovering as a nation is being able to admit that there is a problem with the current curriculum provided to students. This problem can be solved by understanding that students are individuals that strive for personal goals. Our curriculum can change to accommodate the needs of today's generation of students. To get there, we must then be willing to put in the work required to unite for the greater good of the young minds of this country. Now I'm sure you're probably thinking, “How do we come to an agreement of the best methods to reach a solution?” In this paper, I will identify some key issues with our current curriculum and offer up ideas on how we can not only create goal oriented students that see themselves in the future, but suggest how we can raise a new generation of teachers driven to promote accelerated teaching methods.

Now I'll admit, the first goal of developing the best instructional methods to engage students is one that all teachers are probably in agreement with. Teachers have a more productive classroom with active learning when all students are engaged and excited to learn. However, teachers feel pressured to constantly maintain absolute control of their room. Creating an environment that is both educational and fun is possible though. The classroom doesn't have to be silent all of the time. Students shouldn't have to constantly be seated and immobile. As long as you create an engaging lesson that has students participating and learning, you are doing the right thing. Administrators must first be supportive of this in order for teachers to feel encouraged and let loose of the reins a little. What does it mean to engage your class though? How do we measure how much students have learned? In order for teachers to feel confident and generate an animated and exciting lesson for their class, they must first have a learning goal in mind. What do you, as the teacher, want your students to learn from this lesson? Goal oriented lessons are the best method to produce positive results in how students not only engage in lessons but how they perform when asked to show what they know. So how do we measure how much students have learned? The answer is both complex and simple. Teachers must remember that students are individual learners that have their own personal goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Not all students test

successfully using the same testing methods. You must first know your students as individuals and provide a method of testing that will produce true results of their knowledge. Yes, this can be challenging when you have a large class, but it is possible! Next I will address the different ways you can approach assessments and how this change will build a happier environment where all students feel included.

Developing assessments that produce accurate results of student learning is a constant challenge in education. How can we as teachers do something about this in the classroom? We can take control of this by being more flexible in our testing methods. Every test doesn't have to be paper and pencil. Tests can be oral, computer generated, written or discussion based. Tests don't always have to be obvious to students either. For many students, testing can be a stressful event that alters the outcome of their results. Assessing students secretly during lessons is a great way to measure student learning and relieves students of the pressure of testing. Always remember the most important rule with anything you do in the classroom, *know your students as individuals and create an environment based on their personal needs*. If you stick to that rule, you will have an awesome classroom where your students can truly thrive.

Goal number two on our list is to reduce behavioral challenges. Now we can look at this goal from two angles, but let's stick to how teachers perceive and pursue this goal. A classroom that has less behavioral challenges tends to come from an environment that is upbeat, engaging, and lessons are based on student interest. If we look at it from a student's perspective, you can easily understand why. Think about it for a minute, would you want to be trapped in a classroom all day, every day, and do the same mundane tasks? The answer is simple, you wouldn't. Then why would we suppress our students to such a regiment? We can come together as educators and put a stop to the current trends in education. Students should be allowed to have fun while learning new things. When students are having fun, they aren't going to act out or disrupt the class because they want the learning to continue! In addition to delivering lessons that are fun, animated, and student centered, teachers should always have positive incentives in place. We as adults work hard to get rewarded. Students should get rewarded when they work hard, too. Giving students positive feedback always produces much better results than constant negative feedback. Keep your behavioral management geared toward lifting students up, not bring them down. Think about how you react when you get criticized. Even as mature adults it can be hard to swallow. Now look it at from a child's perspective, it's even harder for them to suppress urges to react negatively. Overall, if you develop a happy, student centered classroom, you won't only see happy students, but you will be one happy teacher.

The next goal on our state's agenda is to increase test scores. There is so much pressure put on teachers when it comes to testing. All students are expected to perform to a set standard, and if they don't, the teachers are blamed. Why is it that we expect

students to perform the same way? Why is it so hard to accept that students are individuals that have different strengths and weaknesses? We must learn to accept that not all students perform well in the provided testing environment. Why is it that students must first have a 504 Plan or IEP in order to receive alternative testing and/or testing environments? Students that need these special accommodations are then treated as if they are different from their peers. Students shouldn't feel embarrassed or ashamed because they are being placed in another classroom to complete their test. Individualism amongst all students should be embraced and all students should be given the opportunity to participate in alternative testing when the traditional method doesn't calculate their true potential. Let's put a stop to traditional testing methods that diminish the strengths that each student has. All students have the ability to learn and be successful people. We need to change the way we develop, deliver, and assess learning goals. Try to think about it from the student's perspective. It is really stressful to prepare for state exams, it's even harder on them to complete them, and then there's the anxiety associated with not meeting the standards. When a student feels like a failure, this changes their hopes and dreams. Let's turn away from these traditional testing methods that tear down students and begin promoting their personal goals through instructional methods that drive their future to success.

To establish a classroom that will build accelerated learners, you must first look back at my first white paper, "Advanced Concepts for a Better Future". It will provide you with insight on how to begin your school year and institute new methods of instruction that will inspire your students to become goal oriented thinkers. Remember our ultimate goal as teachers is to build independent and successful adults that will make a positive impact on the world. As a teacher, you may feel that you are just a stepping stone along the way, but what you do with your students will have an impact on their future. Whether or not this is a positive or negative impact is up to you. Do you want to be remembered as the teacher that did the minimum required, or do you want to be the teacher that introduced them to their career? The choice is yours.

In the end, remember why you became a teacher. Harness that memory and take control of your classroom by promoting the individual needs of your students. Each student has strengths, weakness, hopes, dreams, and desires for a life where they make a positive impact on the world. Your new mission as a teacher is to go above and beyond the standards set by your state. You must lead the way by creating an engaging, exciting, and happy classroom environment that will be successful from day one. Don't be discouraged by the number of students you have or the limited amount of resources available. You can do this! With the support of your fellow teachers, parents, and community, you can establish an accelerated classroom that will be an integral part of a better future.

To see the latest on my movement for change, follow me on Twitter. @CanterAmie