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5 Reflections for Teachers Heading Into Summer Break

By: Digital Media in the Classroom



The summer is approaching and teachers everywhere are excited for some much needed time off. It's one of the main perks of being a teacher. Oh, don't get me wrong. There are lots of perks when you are a teacher. Working only 9 - 3 everyday, long winter breaks, spring break, and federal holidays.

Are you picking up on my sarcasm? I hope so, because I'm laying it on pretty thick.

Actually, this is the perfect time for me to reflect upon the school year that was. The successes, the failures and everything in-between. A number of ideas came to mind, but a few thoughts seemed to resonate with me.

Reflection #1: How can we ask students to be life-long learners if we aren't learning ourselves? Educators must become digitally literate.

I consider myself pretty tech savvy. But it wasn't until April of 2011 that I decided to actually use myTwitteraccount. 880+ followers later, Twitter is now the best professional development and learning tool I have ever encountered. Did I mention ever?!

Teaching is my third and last career, and thank goodness I took the Twitter plunge. Even though I consider myself a "content expert," if Google can answer my students questions, I better have more to offer. That's where Twitter comes in. I have read more, learned more, and connected more with innovative thinkers from all over the world, more in the past 10 months than possibly the other 39 years of my life on earth.

Education reform, technology in the classroom, digital media, iPads, apps, apps and more apps. Educational pedagogy, inspiration, motivation, support.....you bet. I encounter it all. I am more committed than ever to continue my life long learning.

Reflection #2: I never ask a student to complete an activity I wouldn't do myself. I don't do worksheets. Neither do they.

I came into the year wanting my students to blog. So I began to blog last summer. I now submit educational blogs to 6 national publications.

I have certain expectations and techniques for video production. I personally produce 3-4 videos a month, and work directly with my students on these *real* projects to exemplify those techniques. I was a terrible test taker and poor note writer as a student, so we don't take tests in my class and I allow students to videotape and record lessons as tutorials, rather than taking copious notes.

My students collaborate, work independently and create videos to tell stories, promote positive news, and to show

content comprehension for a variety of subject matter.

Reflection #3: I never did well on tests. I performed best on project-based learning & assessment. Guess which one we do in my class?

I have come to realize that I have successfully been implementing project-based learning for the past seven years. Now, my critics will tell you that's because of my content; broadcast technology and film. My content must be presented as projects.

In part, they are correct. But I firmly believe that by basing my classes and instruction on projects for comprehension and assessment, students have fallen in love with the process and therefore like completing our coursework.

Reflection #4: We ask our students to collaborate, share, communicate, and create. Shouldn't teachers do the same in their work?

Through my blogs, videopublishing, tweets, podcasts, educational conferences and various other forms of social media, I relish the opportunity to reach out to educators all over the world to hear their stories. I want to learn from them. Share a common experience.

I believe that not only should all educators find their niche in a similar fashion, but also that it should be a requirement. Not a state mandate or school mandate, "you must do this....." and have teachers everywhere cringe. But rather, each of us should check our internal ticker, look in the mirror, and realize, there is a greater world out there for all of us if we allow for it to present itself.

Educators everywhere, please, take the leap. Take the initiative to guide your own professional learning. You won't regret it.

Reflection #5: Quote from student - "We learn more than technical skills in Mr. Goble's class. We learn life skills." Bingo!

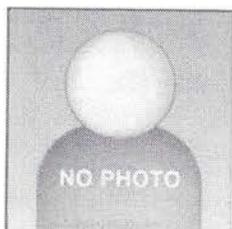
We all truly want to prepare our students for a successful life. That is the essence of why we became educators. I don't believe we chose this profession to stand in front of a row of desks, talk for 50 minutes, and expect students to glean wisdom from us that would guide their success later in life.

I believe we all want to engage our students in the creation and re-creation of their thoughts, ideas, hopes and dreams, that are relevant to the world they will live in. Not the world we were told was in store for us. Beyond the curriculum, we are in fact teaching our students life skills that will hopefully empower them to make smart choices for the rest of their lives.

Summer break is a great time to reflect on the past, and prepare for the next school year to become better teachers, better mentors, and find ways to continue our life-long learning. I'm proud to be a teacher and I wish you all a restful, reflective summer.

What reflections have you considered at the end of this school year? Share in the comments section!

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Great article. Teaching is definitely creative thinking. And an excellent point the author makes about assigning work that you as a teacher would or would not do.