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Learning Belief Statements

I believe that a positive relationship must first be established before authentic, meaningful, and long-lasting learning will ever take place. Students must feel safe, respected and valued before they will open their minds to a teacher. Perhaps it is different with students of other ages, but my experience with middle school students has taught me that gaining a student's trust is a delicate, time-consuming process. However, once that mutual trust and respect is gained, real learning can begin to take place.

This belief is supported by Abraham Maslow in *A Theory of Human Motivation* in which he presents his "Hierarchy of Needs" (Maslow, 1943). According to the hierarchy, which is represented as a pyramid, people must fulfill the lower level needs (physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem) before moving on to the highest level (self-actualization). It is interesting to note that within self-actualization, Maslow includes such abilities as problem-solving, creativity and discernment. These would seem to provide a direct correlation to Bloom's highest orders of the cognitive domain: Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation (Bloom, 1956). Unfortunately, many of our students today come from environments in which they lack even the lowest level needs. Teachers play a critical role in building students up to a point where the most effective learning can occur.

Of course, building interpersonal connections with students and addressing learning goals must be a simultaneous, cyclical process. As a technology teacher, much of my curriculum involves teaching keyboarding and basic computer skills rather than more advanced concepts. While this sometimes makes it difficult to reach above the Application level of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), I still try to make sure that my students are experiencing learning that is applicable in the real world. This Standard Report Test is an authentic assessment that I use with my students at the conclusion of our "Formatting Standard Reports" chapter. The students are given instructions and a Word document that has many formatting errors. Students correct the errors and are evaluated according to a scoring guide. Ultimately, my hope is that students leave my classroom with the computer skills they need to be successful in high school and the knowledge that they are valuable, unique individuals.

During the three years I taught Special Education, I gained a firm belief in the power of differentiated instruction. I had the opportunity to work with many different types of students; from the innocent and gentle mentally retarded to the misunderstood learning disabled to the frustrating emotionally disordered. While not always a positive experience for me, finding methods to reach such a wide variety of learners taught me that students do indeed learn differently and exhibit intelligence in many different ways (Gardner, 1983).

During the time I taught Special Education, I developed this Spelling Practice PowerPoint based on the Stetson spelling curriculum I was using at the time. The teacher was suggested to conduct "See, Say, Spell, Write" study sessions in which each

spelling word was briefly displayed on an overhead projector for the entire class to practice. However, by developing this PowerPoint I was able to allow students to work on individual spelling lists based on their needs rather than having the entire class working together on the same list. In my class, each student worked individually at a computer. The PowerPoint was automatically timed to display each word very briefly on the screen. After the word was displayed, the student would say the word aloud, spell the word verbally, then write the word down on paper. When finished, they would check their own papers to see where they needed to improve. I tracked student improvement in the Spelling Progress Chart which allowed me to record scores and visually evaluate each student's overall progress from week to week as well as their improvement from pretest to post-test. Generally, even students who did not study at home would show reasonable improvement when using the PowerPoint practice method.

I believe that technology plays an essential role in supporting human learning and that the application of technology in the educational environment will continue to become increasingly critical in the future. Technology provides a wide variety of tools for students to construct and demonstrate their own meaningful learning and therefore achieve higher order thinking. To be meaningful, learning must be active, constructive, intentional, authentic, and cooperative (Jonassen, 2003).

So how does technology fit into education? The following statement from the *Learning to Solve Problems with Technology* textbook best sums it up:

". . . the most productive and meaningful uses of technology will not occur if technologies are used in traditional ways – as delivery vehicles for instructional lessons. Technology cannot teach students. Rather, learners should use technologies to teach themselves and others." (Jonassen, 2003)

My Computers Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow WebQuest demonstrates my commitment to ensuring learning is meaningful in my classroom according to the definition in *Learning to Solve Problems with Technology* (Jonassen, 2003). The WebQuest was developed during the summer of 2006 and I used it in my Computer Applications class during the following school year. The students responded well and the results were very good. With a little polishing, I will continue to use this WebQuest in the future.

The Multimedia Survey Report was also developed during the summer of 2006. Although the survey was conducted with actual students, I have not yet had my students create and conduct their own surveys. However, some ideas I would like to try in the near future can be found on page 2 under the "Additional Uses" heading.

Though I do not believe that technology will ever replace the teacher in a classroom, technology can increase teacher effectiveness when used as a cognitive tool. It does not and cannot solve all of the problems that educators face in schools today, but technology can help us close achievement gaps, connect students to the real world, and prepare them for a bright and hopeful future.

References

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