**Jeff Charbonneau's Philosophy of Teaching**

I welcome my students to class the same way in every class period of every day. I say very simply, “Welcome back to another day in paradise.” It has become my mantra, and to my students it has become a bit legendary. Even students who have never taken my classes will ask me if today is another day in paradise when I walk down the halls. The reality is that paradise cannot simply be found. It must be built, maintained and improved each and every day. It requires sweat equity, triumphs over adversity and consistently positive attitudes. Paradise also removes the words “can’t," "too hard" and "impossible” from our vocabulary. This concept of paradise has become my philosophy of teaching. Great teachers create a paradise not only within their own classroom, but also in their school and greater community.

To create my teaching paradise I follow six strategies:

**Today is the most important day for every one of my students.** I can be the best teacher in the world for 99 days in a row, but with a single ill-timed comment I can lose a student’s respect, cause a student to lose academic focus and possibly taint an entire subject for a student. A great teacher must be great every single day, or they may lose their students in an instant. Therefore, I make it my number-one priority to be encouraging to every person on campus. This has led to a classroom that encourages questions, values each student for who they are, and allows students to openly share their academic struggles and success. As a result I have been selected by two different groups of seniors (classes of 2004 and 2009) as the keynote speaker for graduation. It is humbling to be recognized as a consistent, positive influence in their high school careers.

**Great teachers do not allow failure.** Students have learned that it is really hard to fail my classes. It is equally difficult to earn an “A.” My courses are extremely rigorous. Every class I teach is now articulated for college credit. In order to earn a high score, students must become masters of the subject. They must demonstrate higher-order thinking and be effective communicators. Very few students earn a solid “A” in my courses. On the other hand, I refuse to allow students to fail. Assignments can be resubmitted and tests can be reattempted. I have no reason to punish students who do not learn on my schedule as long as they do ultimately learn the subject. Given these opportunities to improve grades, most students are motivated to learn difficult concepts. When students occasionally do not take advantage of these “second chances,” I follow up with simple one-on-one chats about their grades and make phone calls home. If that does not work, I find out their class schedule and arrange for extra study time in my room. If they play sports, I contact their coaches. In essence, I bombard them until they realize that the easy way out is to learn the material. I outright refuse to let students say “I can’t.”

**Great teachers create a culture of high ambition and lead by example.** Over the past 11 years I have turned my own professional pursuits into learning opportunities for my students. While earning my master's degree and National Board Certification, and during the process of securing articulation agreements with colleges and universities, I involved my students. They were not only videotaped, surveyed, and assessed, but they also had a voice in the discussion as I continually asked them what I could change in my teaching to help them. They could see through my actions, that I believe we are never finished learning.

**Great teachers help all students, not just the students in their classes.** I get to school at least an hour early each day. There are almost always students already waiting on campus. I welcome them into my room and help them study subjects from English to algebra to music appreciation. My interest in connecting with all students was part of what inspired the Zillah Robot Challenge. Through this program I ensure that even students who have never set foot in my classroom have opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. As a result, all students know that my classroom is a safe place where they can receive help.

**Great teachers are part of the solution.** My school, like almost every school, has limited funding. Rather than lament that fact, I have actively sought out alternative funding solutions. I have written or co-written over $45,000 in grant funding or donations and been a participating member in additional grants of more than $70,000. I have outfitted my classroom with 28 high-powered computers, a 3D-printer, laser engraver and more. While school funding will always be an issue, a quality educator will find solutions to funding deficiencies.

**Great teachers help their peers become better.** Since 2004, I have facilitated online Professional Certification courses as an adjunct faculty member for Central Washington University (CWU). I have helped over 300 teachers in my state earn their Professional Certificate. In January 2013 I will begin offering online courses for the newer Pro-Teach portfolio, as well as continuing to offer online facilitation for National Board Certification candidates through CWU.

Fundamentally, I seek to provide a high-quality high school experience. Yearbook, drama, robots, and quantum mechanics seldom go hand in hand. Then again, paradise is rarely created by the status quo. By following these six strategies I have helped to create a teaching paradise; one that fosters self-confidence, academic success, collaboration and dedication.

*Excerpt from NTOY Application ~ Provided by Jeff Carbonneau (5/12/13)*

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