Keeping it REAL :
Relevant, Engaging, Authentic Learning

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http://eduscapes.com/sessions/real
http://eduscapes.com/sessions/powerpoint

Active Learning

Each year, The Condition of Education (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004) report from the National Center for Education Statistics summarizes the important developments and trends in education. Over the past two decades, 12th graders have reported a declining interest in school. While in 1983 40% found schoolwork often or always meaningful, in 2000 only 28% reported it meaningful. Students who found courses quite or very interesting dropped from 35% to 21% from 1983 to 2000. Students who reported school learning as quite or very important in later life fell from 51% to 39%.

Activity #1

Why technology? How does technology enhance the learning experience? What makes it worth the time, effort, energy, and expense?

Explore REAL learning opportunities.
Select 3 that you think would be useful for your learners.

Activity #2

Explore subject area websites.
What features make them effective or ineffective for your learners?
How would you manage the use of this resource in your classroom?
Share your thoughts about classroom management and technology with your peers.

REAL Questions

Consider questions that aren't just "hooks," instead find the wonder in the materials and connect it to real issues and problems.

Essential Questions
What are the key questions that teachers and students need to be addressing in schools? The following questions were adapted from Wiggins in his book Understanding by Design.
   * What's the heart of your curriculum
       Is history always biased? Does art reflect culture or share it?
   * What are the reoccurring theme?
       What makes a great book?
   * What questions raise other questions?
        In nature, do only the strong survive? Why?

Inquiry and questioning can be found throughout the curriculum:
   * Information inquiry   * Scientific method
   * Historical investigation   * Mathematical problem-solving
   * Mystery writing

Habits of Mind
In the book The Power of Their Ideas (1995), Debbie Meier describes habits of mind that cross content areas:
        • Evidence - How do we know what we know?
        • Viewpoint - Whose perspective does this represent?
        • Connection/Patterns - How is this related to that? What causes what?
        • Supposition - How might things have been different?
        • Relevance - Why is this important? Who cares?
        • Know Thyself - What does it mean to me?

The Human Connection
What's the human dimension of your subject? Create a people connection:
   * Create a personality profile   * Identify leadership qualities
   * Write about his/her inspiration   * Nominate a hero
   * Compare people

Dilemma
An effective learning environment is able to balance coverage with understanding. How do you view this balance?

Activity #1
Explore resources that will engage students and stimulate questioning. What makes these resources REAL (relevant, engaging, authentic, learning)? What are the characteristics of materials that promote questioning?

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REAL Assignments & Assessments

Design assignments that are engaging. Learning environments aren't just lessons, homework, or test preparation. They require assignments that get students excited and actively involved in the learning process. For example, rather than reading about Spanish Influenza epidemic in the textbook, start by going to the Center for Disease Control. Locate the current map on the flu season. What's this year's forecast? What's happening today? Write a diary entry for...? Support it with evidence. Then, start with a diary excerpt and a problem. Where do you think Louise Hancock was living on October 15, 1918? What are the implications of this date? What's the Spanish Influenza Epidemic?
Epidemic Books: *The Great Influenza, The American Plague, The Influenza of 1918, Crispin, Fever 1793, Sweetgrass, A Time of Angels.*

Student Engagement
Is this really important to the world and our students? Read Flow States and Student Engagement in the Classroom by David Shernoff. He conducted a study on student engagement. Explore the following two books for more information on the importance of getting students into "the zone" including establishing clear goals, intensive involvement, complex challenges, and feedback on progress. According to Shernoff, student engagement involves concentration, interest, and enjoyment.
Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1990). Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.
Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1997). Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life.
The graph below is adapted from Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1997).

Ted Sizer stresses the importance of developing good intellectual habits.
   * Perspective - separating opinion from fact and appreciating differences
   * Analysis - examining and reflecting on arguments and weighing evidence
   * Imagination - searching new patterns and evolving views
   * Empathy - respecting and honoring reasonable views
   * Communication - listening as well as clearly sharing ideas
   * Commitment - recognizing the need to act and responding
   * Humility - know one's rights, debts, and limitations
   * Joy - sensing wonder

Ideas

Make a Decision	Create Connection
Build Virtual Adventures	Highlight Dissent & Differences
Collect and Compare Data	Exchange Ideas
Integrate WebQuests	Create!

Activity #1
Explore resources that can be used with REAL assignments. What are the characteristics of assignments that engage students? What tools are effective in assessing student performance on these types of assignments?

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REAL Resources

Textbooks provide well-organized, developmentally appropriate learning resources. These materials work great for some aspects of classroom instruction. However other resources are needed to provide up-to-date information, current events, and alternative perspectives.

Activity #1
Design an activity based on an article. Consider the individual differences in your class. How can focused practice, using reading tools, and integrating real-world reading assignments help particular students in your class? Rethink how your classroom computers are being used. Do all students complete the same activities? How are your computers an opportunity to differentiate to meet the needs of individual children?

Activity #2
Go to Wikipedia. Design an activity that helps a student "fact check" using other resources

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REAL Teaching

Provide Ill-Structured Problems
Real problems are complex and ill-structured. Provide learners with the foundations, skills, and help them locate information.

Focus on Interpretation and Guidance
Offer your students help in interpretation through guided activities.

Present Contemporary Examples
Look for example in controversy.

Teach by Doing
We talk about "learning by doing," why not "teaching by doing." Alfie Kohn (Nov. 2004) presents this idea in the article Challenging Students - And How to Have More of Them in Phi Delta Kappan.

In Feel-Bad Education: The Cult of Rigor and the Loss of Joy (Education Week, Sep 15, 2004), Alfie Kohn discusses need to put the happiness back in education. According to Nel Noddings (Happiness and Education), how students feel about themselves, their teachers, the curriculum, and the experience of school impacts learning. Rich thinking happens in places filled with discovery and excitement.

In the current high-stakes, high-stress educational atmosphere, how do we put the REAL (Relevant, Engaging, Authentic Learning) back into learning to promote enthusiasm, challenge, and life-long learning?

Activity #1
Practice what you preach. Learn to use the digital camera and PhotoStory to tell a story from the point of view of an object in your school.

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