

June 2007 *Wishing you a Happy, Relaxing Summer*

Tips for Teachers

European League for Middle Level Education
An affiliate of the National Middle Schools Association

Student Thoughts on Effective Teaching: Insights for Teachers

David Lynn of The American School of Paris shares what his students have learned about teaching practices. In planning their own lessons, they share their reflections on how their own middle school teachers have performed. Read on; live and learn.

On of the primary advantages of attending an educational conference is being able to share lesson plans and teaching techniques with colleagues from around the world. While most teachers have their own repertoire of creative and innovative classroom techniques, the sharing of ideas is what often helps keep teachers fresh and on the cutting edge. *That's why the Vienna ELMLE conference this coming January should be on your calendar now! Check out www.elmle.org*

One of the culminating activities for eighth graders at **the American School of Paris** is to pair up in groups of three and teach a full lesson. They are assigned a topic and given several weeks to research and prepare. While rubrics set out expectations, students are asked to reflect on some of their favorite lessons and learning moments. One of their tasks as a presenter is to plan for a classroom atmosphere that they feel is ideal.

Below are a list of some responses and reflections from actual students when asked to “reflect on their favorite middle school learning experience”. They were asked, “**What lesson made an impact on you and was both memorable, educational and fun?**”

Kelly, from the United States, reflects on a “Great Inventors” presentation:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

During my 7th grade year, for our advisory we did a project called the inventors project. Every student was allowed to choose an inventor. After each student had an inventor we did weeks of research about that person. After we had all the information we got to start working on the project. The project was based on a wax museum and every person dressed up as the inventor. For example, I did Walt Disney and for the wax museum I dressed up as Minnie Mouse. We had to memorize a speech that was around one minute long and we had a poster with information behind us. We then had to come up with some sort of button that the people who were watching us would be able to press to make us come to life. It was really fun and a memory that will stick with me forever!

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. not only giving an interesting lecture, but having games, pictures, etc. that will get the class involve
2. make it a year/class that I will remember for a long time, that will have an impact on me
3. knowing how to teach a great amount of information that students will remember, but making it fun at the same time

Three things I expect from an ineffective Teacher:

1. Only information with no or little way of getting the class involved
2. Too much having fun, where no one is able to learn anything
3. A lot of information that is not being explained

Alex, from the United States, reflects on a biography activity:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

In seventh grade class, we did biographies of a person of our choice, and no two people could do the same person. It was a good lesson because there wasn't a strong rubric, so we were allowed to be creative and fun. Also, the students led the class so we weren't as bored as we would have been with the teacher. We made colorful posters with pictures, and acted out some of the person's life. It was very fun and memorable because it changed things up, and since there was a rubric just about your speaking skills, it gave us a chance for creativity.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. Do something that the class will be able to remember later in the year, not just something that they forget as soon as class ends.
2. Don't only speak, explain what happened with visual aids, such as skits and pictures. Change things up so the students do not get bored.
3. PowerPoint is good, but sometimes using the class is the best way to show them what really happened.

Three things that I expect from an ineffective teacher:

1. Lecturing only, with no questions allowed, and not fully analyzing the problem.
 2. Not doing any fun classes that allow students to interact to help them understand.
 3. Using only one source, such as skits, PowerPoint, or lecturing, and not doing anything but these.
-

Kyo Young, from South Korea, reflects on a lesson on Greek Myth in seventh grade:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

In 7th grade in English, my teacher helped all the class to understand Greek Myth by making us do the play so we could understand better. However, not every student enjoys acting but everyone enjoyed our teacher's lesson everyday. And then when we were finished studying we did a play on the Golden Apple in front of all our English teacher. I liked this lesson because we didn't just read a novel but we also learned something important by acting, and I never forgot that play.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. Creativity (for example using a video or PowerPoint so everyone can see and understand) Explaining specifically so everyone can understand.
2. Not only speaking but involving people in, kindness, respecting what the students say and helping a student who needs help.
3. If giving out homework, explain what to do clearly, so everyone can do it with confidence

Three things that I expect from an ineffective teacher:

1. Not teaching anything in class, but just playing around. Teaching in a way that no one can understand
2. Not telling the due dates properly

3. Shouting at a students when they didn't something properly. (You should listen to them and ask why they didn't do it and help them).
-

Elena, from Canada, reflects on a seventh grade writing activity:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

One English teacher I had gave us an assignment to write about a memory we recall when we smell a certain thing -- like when I smell candy canes I remember the mini candy canes my mom bought before Christmas, how we would find them in a cabinet, and eat them all before Christmas. After we finished writing a description of the memory she told us to paint a picture of the memory, it could be a scene or an emotion. I thought this was a fun exercise, and I got to do art, which I love. It was just a break from the usual essays because it was different, and it included another subject.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. They should try out different teaching methods.
2. They should involve the class (not teacher centered).
3. They should enjoy teaching.

Three things that I expect from an ineffective teacher:

Three things I expect from an ineffective teacher:

1. Does the same thing all of the time.
 2. They don't take the time to help struggling students.
 3. Doesn't commend students who try.
-

Kody, from Canada, reflects on a seventh grade science lesson

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

In science in 7th grade, we had this cosmetics unit, and as a final project in the last class we set up a lab to make the cosmetics. It was a test of following instructions, using what we knew about chemical compounds and solutions. I managed to make hair gel, perfume, antiperspirant, cologne and then packaged them and wrote our own labs about them. It's one of the few good memories I had of science, but one of the best lessons I've ever had in middle school.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. Creative, entertaining classes where students learn while having fun

2. Knowledge on topic. You can't teach a class unless you know what you're talking about.
3. Genuinely friendly teacher.

Three things that I expect from an ineffective teacher:

1. Lack of knowledge on subject
 2. Far too controlling or not controlling enough
 3. Uninteresting classes with no activities and no trying new things. This leads to students being bored and not paying attention.
-

Emily, from the United States, reflects on an Environmental Science lesson:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

In one of my science classes in 7th grade (Environmental Science), what we did in one lesson is study for our test. The teacher would usually do this occasionally, when we had a big test coming up, so it helped a lot. The way we studied for a test was to play jeopardy, and have the teacher read off questions and the students, that are split up into teams, answer the question. Say if we were learning about the skeleton, she would read point out to areas on her skeleton diagram, and we would have to answer them for points. The winning team would win candy.

What I expect from an effective teacher:

One thing I expect from an effective teacher is creativity. A good teacher needs to have this so that they can make the class more enjoyable for the students. Another one is kindness. It's good to have a kind teacher because then the students would be happy to come to that class everyday. A third one is for the teacher to be doing his/her job, so that they teach the students about their subject, and only their subject.

What I expect from an ineffective teacher:

One thing I don't want to expect from an ineffective teacher is not being to class on time. In one my classes in middle school, I had a teacher who would normally come to class 10 minutes late, so there would be less learning involved. Another I wouldn't expect from a teacher is to be mean to their students. Of course, if a student misses their homework more than once during the term, or doesn't behave in class, then the teacher has a right to punish them. Otherwise, the teacher shall remain calm. A third thing I wouldn't expect from a teacher is not getting the class involved while teaching. A third thing I wouldn't expect from a teacher is not getting the class involved while teaching. If there isn't much fun around

once in a while in every class, then it makes the class boring and sometimes hard for the students to learn.

Ben, from the United States, reflects on a favorite math lesson:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

In seventh grade we did a project in pre-algebra math. The project was to create a game and play it out at the end of the term. We had to create the posters and the actual game. Ours was like a game of Roulette but we used bobbing for apples. It was exciting because it was a challenge to make the right odds also it was enjoyable to bob for apples. Also we had a very good teacher who guided us along and altogether it was a awesome project.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. Creative and exciting lessons.
2. Willing to go the extra mile to help
3. Really friendly and really wants to be a friend and listen to your ideas.

Three things that I expect from an ineffective teacher:

1. Lack of knowledge on the subject
 2. Far too controlling or not controlling enough
 3. Unimaginative and not interesting and unwilling to try new things.
-

Annette, from the United States, reflects on a lesson on water sheds:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

In science class in 6th grade, we did Earth Science. We went out to a sandlot and made water sheds with tin foil and paper towel tubes. Then sent water down and measured how fast they could go down. The group with the fastest watershed won. We learned a lot without realizing it, mainly about how watersheds were created. We also built friend-ships and worked on teamwork. I had a lot of fun and I'll remember it for a long time.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. Kindness. If a teacher is nice, the students will want to come to class and please the teacher. Candy is also good occasionally. A 7th grade math teacher gives out candy every Friday.

2. Creativity. Teaching outside when it's hot inside or showing a homemade movie for a lesson so that the sub only watches the students.
3. Being on time. An 8th grade science teacher is always at least five minutes late to class, or is not organized enough to get everyone quiet.

Three things that I expect from an ineffective teacher:

1. Not being clear, especially on dates. a date is set two weeks in advance, then changed a week later. it throws of everyone and crams assignments in later. lessons are also squished.
2. Useless lessons. Sometimes lessons are spent off topic and the teacher goes a long with it because they do not have enough power over students.
3. Disrespect for students. Sometimes, a teacher can learn from students. discussions and teacher evaluations every term can let a teacher know if they are being effective or ineffective.

Nicole, from the Switzerland, reflects on a lesson involving social studies and lake diving:

My Favorite Middle School Learning Experience:

Last year, in 7th grade, during our last social studies class my teacher took us down to the lake. When we were there he got us involved by making us form a well which was supposed to represent what he was talking about. During this lesson he summed up what he was trying to get through to us for the past year. After he had gave his "speech" we walked to the edge of the lake, and he gave his last words for his lesson and dived into the lake. Almost all of us then jumped in also and swam in the lake with our clothes on. Once it was time to go we walked back up to the school to get our things.

The main thing that I got out of this was that it was majorly creative, fun, and he did get across well, what he was trying to teach. Two key things that he tried to incorporate into his lessons was to involve the class and do different activities during class time.

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. enthusiasm and good composure
2. involvement of the class
3. a variety of different ideas (classes aren't always the same)

Three things that I expect from an effective teacher:

1. lecturing/ class is not involved
2. doesn't make efforts to openly offer help for students
3. jam packing lots of tedious information into students' heads

Looking Ahead: It's Summer! Take a Break! Travel! Read! Go Fishing! Enter a Beauty Pageant! Design a Flag! Sleep long and hard! Then book yourself into the Vienna ELMLE conference, January 2008. Check out registration details at www.elmle.org. *You won't regret it!*