CHAPTER 1: APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY TO TEACHING

Teaching Can Be a Rewarding Experience

Good teaching is as much the result of one’s beliefs, values, and emotions as of one’s formal knowledge. A few examples of beliefs that support good teaching are that teaching is one of society’s most valuable and rewarding activities, that teaching must be done as well as possible every day, that it is important to get students excited about learning, and that there is no such thing as an unteachable student.

Special Young Teacher Wins A $1,500 Apple

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Lisa Shipley will try almost anything to get her students’ attention.

Macaroni for punctuation. Mr. Potato Head for a lesson in poetry personification. Popcorn for bribes.

"I always look at a lesson and say, ‘Would that make me sleep?’" said Shipley, 24. "If it would, I would not do that to children."

Shipley, now in her second year as a seventh-grade teacher at A.B. Green Middle School in the Maplewood-Richmond Heights School District, is one of 51 teachers across the country selected recently to receive the Sallie Mae First Class Teacher Award.

The award, sponsored by the Student Loan Marketing Association, carries a $1,500 prize and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington Sept. 20. The award, in its 12th year, recognizes first-year teachers who have shown outstanding performance. In Illinois, the award will go to Sarah Drake, a history teacher at Naperville High School in Naperville, near Chicago.
The principal at A.B. Green, Arline Kalishman, recommended Shipley for the award. "This girl is such a winner," said Kalishman, whose school has won a national blue ribbon for excellence.

Kalishman gave these examples:

- Before Shipley’s first teaching day a year ago, she compiled five notebooks, one for every seventh-grade teacher, to use in teaching novels. The books contained questions about novels, background information and suggested activities.
- Shipley helped train students for oratorical contests. Some students took first place.
- She sponsored the yearbook and got businesses to donate 10 cameras to students and to process their film for free.
- She oversaw the production of two plays.
- Shipley had her students decorate potatoes to teach the idea of inanimate objects taking on human characteristics.
- She had students redesign Frosty the Snowman in a simulated ad campaign to learn descriptive writing, persuasive writing and propaganda techniques.
- She compiled her own textbooks, such as an 80-page collection of poetry and a 50-page collection of short stories. The books discuss topics such as point of view, character and narrator.

Shipley gets some ideas from the Internet; others are her own creations. Raw test scores show Shipley’s students performed as well or better than students in previous years, Kalishman said.
Shipley, who grew up in south St. Louis County, said she picked A.B. Green over 14 other job offers and $12,000 more pay in a wealthier district because "they needed me here." She likes to work with students from less-affluent homes, who appreciate what she does. She liked the freedom school officials offer to take risks with her 120 students.

Katie Mallon, 12, said, "She tries to make learning more fun."

Shipley said she was delighted but surprised to get the award.

"I don’t feel I’m doing anything outstanding," she said. "I give the best I can every day so the kids will give their best. It’s something everyone should do."

Questions and Activities

1. Lisa Shipley, the first-year teacher in this story, is obviously internally motivated, creative, and not shy about taking initiative. Do you think these are characteristics that people are born with or that develop with experience? If you think such characteristics are at least partly learnable, and if you think you might be lacking in one or more of these areas, what can you do to improve your levels of motivation, creativity, and leadership?

2. Good teachers spend a considerable amount of time preparing for class so that, as Lisa Shipley pointed out, students are not bored or turned off. In this chapter and in Chapter 16 we describe how to create a Reflective Journal as a way to help you plan, revise, and refine your instruction. If you would like to be as dynamic and effective as the teacher in this story, resolve to begin a Reflective Journal this semester and to add to it in the coming years.

3. This story illustrates that good teachers are internally motivated and committed to all aspects of their role. One way to start down the road to being this kind of teacher is to
make a list of the special knowledge and talents you possess and to then think about the various school-related activities in which you could participate that would allow you to use those capabilities.