



Directed Teaching

Drew Laurence uses technology to engage students with severe behavioral and emotional problems.

It takes a special teacher to work with students with special needs. And Drew Laurence definitely fits the bill. He teaches “emotionally disturbed kids in a small school setting,” including students with oppositional defiance disorder and autism. The next step for many of these students “would be lock-down.” Drew has found some innovative ways to help his students learn social skills, and sometimes move into regular classroom environments. And his attitude and constant desire to help his students succeed are positively infectious.

During the 2002–03 school year, Drew was able to create a mini-society for his students, allowing them to learn valuable life skills such as how to apply for and hold a job, how to handle money, and how to interact with others. One of his successes with this project came during the résumé writing process. Drew often suggested which jobs each student should apply for, then helped them write their résumés using the word processor. Many of Drew’s students didn’t know where to start, because they did not see themselves as having any useful skills. In showing the students how, for example, time spent playing baseball exemplified experience working as part of a team, Drew

Name: Drew Laurence

Title: Special Education Teacher

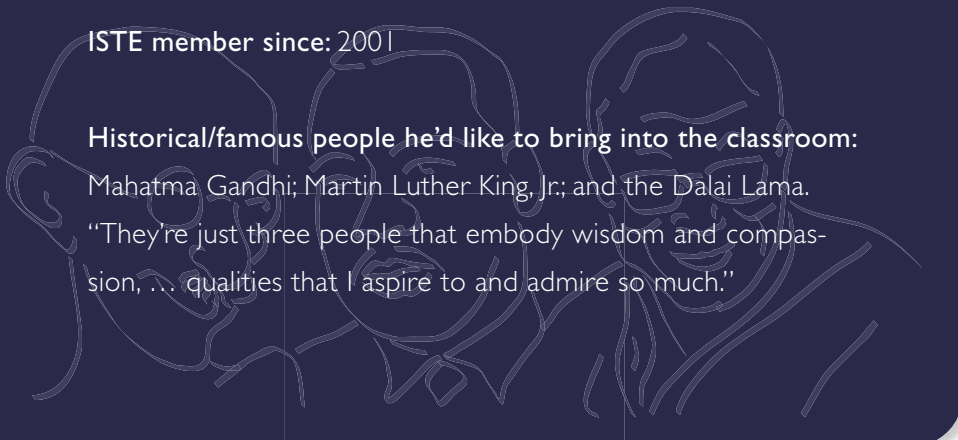
Location: Youngson Special School, Portland, Oregon

ISTE member since: 2001

Historical/famous people he’d like to bring into the classroom:

Mahatma Gandhi; Martin Luther King, Jr.; and the Dalai Lama.

“They’re just three people that embody wisdom and compassion, ... qualities that I aspire to and admire so much.”



Photos and story by L&L staff



“helped them bring out the positive aspects of their lives—to see how extraordinary they really are.”

Another one of Drew’s successful classroom projects piggybacks on his school’s Second Step violence prevention program, released by the Committee for Children, a U.S. nonprofit organization that produces curriculum and other programs related to social and emotional learning. Second Step uses drama to “help kids with anger management, develop empathy, social awareness.” Drew has taken this focus on drama and role-playing one step further. He has students record and edit movies using a digital video camera and iMovie (when his students are physically and emotionally capable) and transition into writing scenarios to act out. He began by allowing students to use his camera. Then, after seeing how successful the project was with his students, he pursued a mini-grant from his district to buy a camera for the classroom.

Drew lights up when he talks about one success story from the 2003–04 school year. “My favorite kid was also my most challenging.” When Daniel first came into Drew’s class, he acted out nearly every day, spending much of his time in an isolation room. Drew and his fellow teachers worked hard to show Daniel

that “no matter how aggressive he got, we still loved him. ... The louder he got, the softer we got. All the statements we made to him were prefaced by ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’” In deciding how best to help Daniel, Drew looked at the core issues affecting his behavior. Deep down, he says, “most of the kids are disempowered, and they act out looking to regain some power.” Daniel had a reputation for being bossy, so Drew assigned Daniel the role of director on a classroom movie. Props are an important part of any movie production, but Drew also uses props for his behind-the-scenes people. When Daniel was in the role of director, he wore the black director’s beret, and “the pride he showed was just incredible.” He was responsible, polite, and in control. “The kids were just in awe.” Drew has begun to see Daniel exhibit the same behavior in other aspects of the class, and he believes Daniel will be able to transfer to a less restrictive environment very soon. Drew is so proud to see Daniel “taking control of his own life.”

Drew’s next goal is to make his teaching transparent to the families of his students. He believes that “the more involved a parent is, the more active and engaged the student is.” He works with birth parents, foster parents, and caregivers as much as

he can, but he often doesn’t feel it is enough. His dream technology would bring the families into the classroom—“make sure everyone knows exactly what’s out there, what standards you’re addressing, what the lessons are, the expectations are, and what the outcomes are.” Until this dream becomes a reality, Drew is working on a Web site (<http://drewlaurence.com>) to connect him with families.

