Mr. Wright's Level II Professional Teaching Portfolio

Joseph A. Wright

Merit Academy

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Introduction

As Utah continues to face a serious teacher shortage, as mentioned repeatedly in local news (Francis, 2018), some Utahns may wonder if some of our hired educators are qualified to do their jobs. In order to address this concern, the Utah State Board of Education (aka USBE) created the EYE or Entry Years Enhancement Program, in order to assist beginning teachers to "develop successful teaching skills and strategies" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 1). This program has been designed to function as a structured support program that should assist beginning teachers as they transition into the world of education, and its ultimate goal is to provide "accredited school, district, and state support [for new teachers] for three-year period" (p. 1).

The main goal however is to make sure that USBE's goals of highly effective teaching are being met. USBE created the "**Utah Effective Teaching Standards**", which align with the national INTASC teaching standards that all teachers be "highly effective", as summarized here:

- **Standard 1:** Student Development

- **Standard 2:** Individual & Cultural Diversity

- **Standard 3:** Positive Collaborative Learning

- **Standard 4:** Discipline Proficiency

- **Standard 5:** Assessment

- **Standard 6:** Planning

- **Standard 7:** Instruction & Learning

- **Standard 8:** Reflection & Evidence-Based Teaching

- **Standard 9:** Collaboration

- **Standard 10:** Ethical Comportment (pp 2-3)

I will proceed to go through each of these standards, and explain my efforts in attempting to meet each one. While my experience as a teacher over the last 5 years hasn't been without its difficulties, I do believe that I have proven myself to be an effective teacher and that I will continue to strive for improvement and bettering of myself and my work with my students.

Standard 1: Student Development

As found in the USBE's EYE (Entry Years Enhancement) Brochure, this standard is summarized thus: "The teacher understands cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and physical areas of student development" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 2). In my experience, mostly with middle schoolers, I have learned that at each grade level, there is a distinctive developmental maturity that accompanies each of these grade levels. Beyond that, each student is unique, and some are more developed than others, and often in different areas. They are at a challenging time in their lives, but one strategy that experts have suggested is to "design lessons that include a full range of sensory motor experiences, including music, smell, touch, and emotion" (Salyars & McKee, 2009).

In my Utah Studies class, for example, we do exactly this! After talking about location, and how both addresses and GPS coordinates can be used to find absolute locations, I demonstrate how some hobbyists have taken that skill to the next level via geocaching. We log onto the Geocaching.com website, and look at some examples of geocaches, including several unique ones (for example, see: https://youtu.be/O2j3byPfoYQ). Then, we go and find several nearby geocaches. One that I created myself is found here: https://coord.info/GC4WAQ2. Meanwhile, the students are learning about location in a fun and engaging way, and then for homework they have the option of going out and completing the experience by finding a

geocache of their own. However, as some may struggle with the technology, or not have access to a smart phone / internet, I do offer an alternative assignment.

Figure 1.   Geocache Experience Homework Assignment

T3D2 Option B HW: Geocaching Adventure! (Due T3D4 aka _____)

As we discussed in class, location is an important part of history and geography. One activity that relies heavily on the concept of location is called **geocaching**. Check out the following video to learn more:

1. Go to www.geocaching.com and sign up for a free account! Tell me the username that you created:

chickenmaniac10

2. Watch this video on downloading a free app for android here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZmTl5Ijz_0. Here's an intro if you are using an iPhone: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Aq7Yvp444Y. After you have installed the app, do the following:

    A. Check for nearby geocaches. Which one did you decide to go after? Make sure to mention the unique code, which starts with GC_____, for example, **GC6N6DC, GC4ZQQ8, GC4YERT**, etc.

GC4J5MN

    B. Why did you decide to go after this particular geocache?

It was close to my house

    Note: *Make sure that before you go, you pick a relatively easy one in regards to "Terrain Rating" and "Difficulty Rating". As this is most your first try at a geocache, don't overdo it.*

3. After making the attempt with your smartphone, answer the following questions:

    A. Did you find the geocache? Describe your experience!

Yes! It was tough, but I found it!

    B. How did you feel after the experience? Would you like to try it again?*

That was really fun! I'm going to try again sometime soon!

Note that not everyone is successful the first time, and that is ok! I am more than happy to help you out if you are interested in trying again.

Here we can see the work done by one of Mr. Wright's Utah Studies students (Source: Joseph Wright)

There are many different developmental models, created by leading experts on adolescents, such as Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg, who believe that there are distinct (though different) stages for children and young adults as they develop, and I have seen parts of these theories manifest themselves in my own classroom (Armstrong, 2003, pp 61-63). It's very important that we recognize that younger students' brains are still developing, and they don't always see eye to eye with us adults, or even each other, for that matter! That is why I take a relaxed approach when students question things, because I recognize that they are still learning to understand and respect boundaries, and their own place in the world and in our school. As long as they are respecting the rights of others, then all is well.

Standard 2: Individual & Cultural Diversity

The second standard in the EYE brochure is summarized in this way: "The teacher understands individual learner differences and cultural and linguistic diversity" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 2). I actually received my minor in Bilingual Education / TESOL, so this is something that I am quite familiar with. Students, despite their challenges or difficulties, especially those that are English Language Learners, or ELLs, all have "funds of knowledge" that they bring with them. If we as educators can realize this, and are willing to consider the fact that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2006, p. ix-x), we will overall be much better for it.

We have some great students here at Merit Academy. I have had several ELLs during my time here (though no ELL classes), and though they may struggle with the language, the idea of funds of knowledge has helped remind me of their value. Too often it is easy to dismiss a student who is struggling, especially with a language barrier. However, they are indeed competent, and

my experience as a Christian missionary in a foreign country (where I had to learn to speak

Portuguese, the local language) taught me empathy for ELLs. One could be a brain surgeon, but

without linguistic abilities, they might well be regarded (incorrectly of course) as a fool.

Thus it is with all of our students. I have had several ELLs in my World Geography

classes this past year, made up of ninth graders. Several were Asian, one Latino. We talked about

Latin America extensively in our class, and also Asia (to a lesser degree), and every time we did,

I made a special effort to include our ELLs or others who had family or a background elsewhere

in the world. Our Latino student was very eager to participate, despite some linguistic

limitations, but as the class progressed, and he and the other ELLs recognized that we were

happy to hear and assist them as needed with their English limitations. I'm happy to say that our

ELL students ended up being some of the most successful in that class.

Whenever a student struggles to understand what we are discussing, I try several different

things. I will try describing it in context, and that sometimes helps. I have also learned that it is

important to verify understanding, and each student learns in a variety of ways. Howard Gardner

explored this theory several books, including his 2006 book titled *Multiple Intelligences: New

Horizons in Theory and Practice.* In it, he identified a number of different abilities that students

may have in varying degrees, such as "visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, [&]

bodily-kinesthetic", and so on (Gardner, 2006). Whenever a student is struggling with one way

of learning, I attempt to try another, varied approach.

For example, one student was struggling to put into words what they understood. I spoke

with him briefly, and we talked about his hometown, where he grew up, etc. I made sure that he

could see that I was appealing to his interpersonal intelligence, and he to mine. After developing

some rapport, I then helped him to see what I was talking about by drawing a picture (spatial intelligence), and describing the scene out loud to him (linguistic intelligence), and also acting out the motions (kinesthetic intelligence). This he was able to understand, whereas my original description was lost to him.

Standard 3: Positive Collaborative Learning

The third standard of effective teaching, according to USBE, is stated as: "[An effective] teacher works with learners to **create environments** that support **individual** and **collaborative learning**, positive **social interactions**, **active** engagements in **learning**, and **self-motivation**" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 2, emphasis added). As we have been exploring PBL / Problem or Project Based Learning this past year, I have found that PBL is very well suited to helping teachers meet this standard. In our Utah Studies class, the students were required to work together in groups to not only create self-guided tours for their local communities, but also required to do extensive research and activities related to this final project.

They were allowed quite a bit of student voice and choice in choosing their topics, yet they also had positive support from me and their classmates through feedback and other classroom discussions, which is crucial to the success of PBL ("Why Project", 2018). PBL has helped my class meet this standard. Students are excited about learning, they are proud of their work, and they are looking for ways to consistently make their PBL projects better. In U.S. History for example, they got to pick a **Colonial-Era Occupation** that they could research and report on, with one group making a memorable poster and display on "Brewing", and then making home-made root beer for our public event. Another group made a series of fancy wigs, as

part of their Wigmaker research project. When learning becomes fun like this, everyone wins,

and it reminds us teachers exactly why we got involved in education in the first place.

Figure 2.   Viva Italia: Poster Board for World Geography PBL Assignment

This final project illustrates some of the knowledge students gained as they learned more about a foreign country of their choice, in this case, Italy. They also had a lot of fun with it! (Source: Joseph Wright)

Figure 3.   Memorial Park: Another Example of PBL in Action
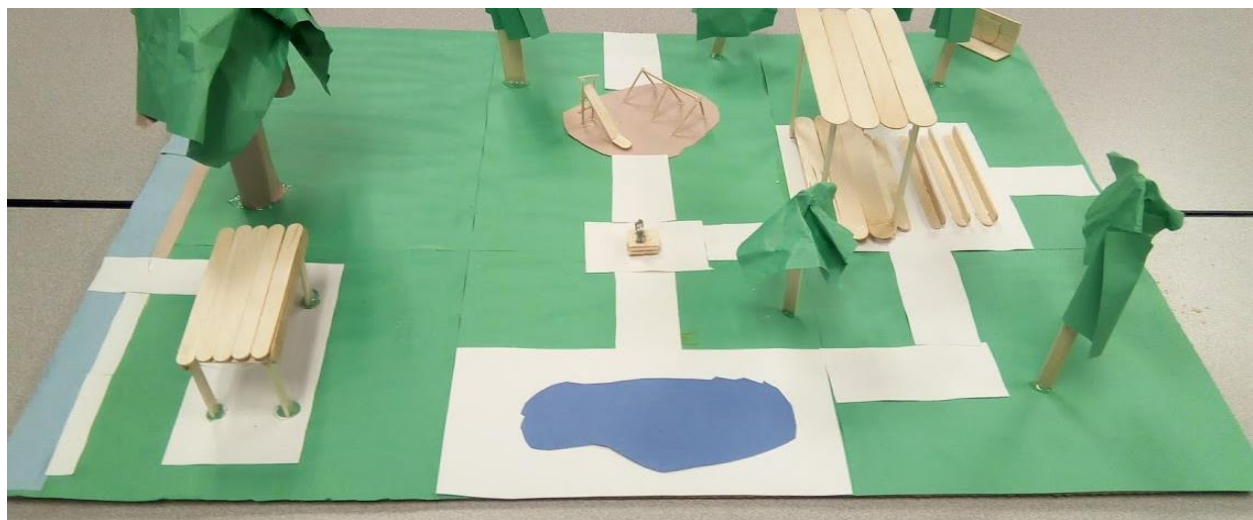
*This is a "Tangible Product" that Mr. Wright's Utah Studies students could make to show off their local community, as part of their **"Hometown Hero Self-Guided Tour"** Project. This particular one is a surprisingly accurate rendition of Memorial Park, Payson, Utah (Source: Joseph Wright)*

Standard 4: Discipline Proficiency

The fourth standard of the "**Utah Effective Teaching Standards**" is summarized this way: "The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 2). As a social studies teacher, I could spend pages describing the various concepts that we are expected to know and teach our students about depending on the discipline, but I'll instead choose to focus on just a few that we have looked at in our classes.

One of the most basic principles I've learned that students should be familiar with in the social sciences is **critical inquiry**, and being able to analyze and pick apart the sources we are studying, particularly **primary and secondary sources,** which are key to understanding the past. As we study the past in some aspect or another in all of the classes I teach, I am reminded of the phrase **"For now we see through a glass, darkly…"** as quoted from the New Testament of the Bible, in 1 Corinthians, 13:12. It's a favorite quote that I have up in my room, because it succinctly summarizes the fact that as we look back to the past, we don't have a complete picture, just pieces. And even then, those pieces are seen often through the eye of the beholder, which can taint and contaminate the actual facts of the case. **Bias** is an incredibly powerful thing, and I always teach my students to seek out the biases that they might see in the sources we analyze, and to then deduce what impact that may have had on their perspective, and then to come to their **own conclusions** based on the facts.

Figure 4 illustrates this point well. **Editorial or Political Cartoons** have been around for centuries, as a way to critique leaders, issues or other parts of life or society, though they usually do so in an often biased manner. In nearly every class that I teach, I make a point to educate our

students to better know how to **analyze / interpret these cartoons** (I even made a fun video to help teach my students how to better analyze them; see it at: https://youtu.be/6HtQ1XqbiYw). This gives them a unique perspective not only into past dialogues that we as a society were having, but also helps prepare them to enter the current dialogue that still uses this method to share viewpoints & perspectives, all while making a point.

Figure 4.   Editorial Cartoon Analysis: King Andrew the First

T4D6: Political Cartoon Analysis:

One powerful way to express feelings, emotions, and good way to get a snapshot of society is through **Political Cartoons**. For this assignment, you'll be looking at **two different political cartoons**, and analyzing **the message they are sharing** as well as the **way that they do this.**

As you answer the questions below each cartoon, consider the **Cartoon Analysis Guide.** Good luck!

Cartoon #1:   **Analysis Worksheet**

BORN TO COMMAND.

OF VETO MEMORY.

KING ANDREW THE FIRST.

"King Andrew the First," author unknown,
Library of Congress, 1832.

I See...	It means...
First Glance (what is the issue being addressed?) *taking the presidency & turning it into being a king*	(How does the author/cartoonist feel about it?) *"king andrew" is abusing his presidancy.*
Symbolism: *crown = king thrown→ Robe→*	*abusing role as president.*
Exaggeration: *not really a king*	*again abusing his role*
Labeling: *constitution on the ground bank of the united states*	*trampling on the consritution & the bank.*
Analogy: *comparing him to a king*	*abusing his role.*
Irony: *never ment to be a king*	*no right to but he does.*

Here was a cartoon from the 1800s regarding the way that Pres. Andrew Jackson was conducting himself as president. The students were asked to look for deeper meaning (Source: Joseph Wright)

Of course, after the students have learned how to analyze these cartoons, I also ask that they take that skill one step further, by putting that knowledge to use and using their own knowledge and creativity to create a cartoon of their own. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate several

examples of this. This helped foster increased relevance for the students while also preparing

them for future civic engagement regarding issues that they themselves are passionate about.

Figure 5.   Modern Day Issues: Alcoholism & Immigration

*These political cartoons, created by several 9ᵗʰ graders, illustrate two different perspectives on a few different modern issues, specifically **alcoholism** and **immigration** (Source: Joseph Wright)*

Figure 6.   Mexico & America: A Political Cartoon

This political cartoon, by one of my gifted 8ᵗʰ graders, depicts the situation that the U.S. and Mexico found themselves in regarding the recent annexation of Texas in the 1840s, and ultimately the Mexican American War in 1849 (Source: Joseph Wright)

Standard 5: Assessment

The fifth standard found in the **EYE Brochure** is stated as: "The teacher uses multiple methods of **assessment** to **engage learners** in their **own growth**, monitor learner **progress**, **guide planning** and **instruction**, and **determine** whether the **outcomes** described in content standards have been met." ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 2). As good teachers know, it is crucial that we evaluate the knowledge and skills of our students regarding the discipline that we are engaged in teaching them. And yes, sometimes that means we utilize traditional, formal assessment methods (multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc.).

One expert on assessment had this to say about them: "A good test has a role to play…it's an audit. It's a snapshot. You don't run your business **for the audit**. You want more than a snapshot, you want a whole family album. But the audit and the snapshot **have a place** in the larger picture" (Wiggins, 2002). I believe that Wiggins hit it right on the money. "Formal assessment" is sometimes seen by some educators as a four-letter word, but I believe it has merit and value in our schools and in society as well. Students and teachers both need benchmarks to analyze where they are in their learning and teaching. Have they been over utilized in the past? Without question, but that doesn't mean they still don't have a place in the classroom.

I use formal assessments in this way, as benchmarks to verify that students are progressing as they ought to. Yet there are many **other** types of assessment that occur in the classroom as well, and I make use of these also. **Informal** as well as **formative assessment** are tools in my "teacher's toolbox" that are go-tos in my classroom. For example, in the **PBL Projects** that I have created for my several classes, we utilize various such assessments as well as other opportunities for feedback, assessment and reflection. For instance, we recently completed our **Hometown Hero PBL** in Utah Studies, where the students research and learn all

about a chosen community here in Utah Valley (often their own hometown). Throughout the

project, they are consistently giving each other **feedback** and assessing each other's work, in an

effort to improve their final product, a **self-guided tour** of their local community.

Figure 7.   Hometown Hero PBL Project Outline

Assignment and Day Assigned in Class:		Due Date:
Part I: Reflection Journal (+8 of the 12 days require entry; Indiv. Work / IW) = 15 pts ea; total = 120 pts	Date Assigned: T2D9	Draft: T2D14 Final: T2D19
Part II A & B: Site Survey Assignments (IW) **Part IIA: Field Work in class** = 45 pts (visit 3+ sites in **downtown Springville**) **Part IIB: Independent Site Survey** = 45 points (visit 3 sites in your chosen community) = 45 pts ea; total 90 pts total	Date Assigned: T2D10	Draft: T2D15 Final: T2D17
Part IIIA: Hometown Interview (IW) or **Part IIIB: Tangible Product (IW)** = 75 pts (50 pts EC to do BOTH)	Date Assigned: T2D13	Draft: T2D16 Final: T2D20
Part IV: Hometown Display Board Project (Group Work / GW) = 100 pts	Date Assigned: T2D17	Draft: T2D19 Final: T2D20
Part V: Hometown Guided Tour Project (GW) = 100 pts	Date Assigned: T2D9	Draft: T2D18 Final: T2D20
PBL Culmination: Jigsaw Presentation and Notes (GW / IW = 40 pts	Date Assigned: T2D20	**Final Present Day:** May 15th

*Above is just part of the project outline that I give to my 7th graders at the commencement of this project, their final project in the Utah Studies class. Note the required **draft due dates**, where students are required to bring in the work they have thus far to share, give & receive feedback (Source: Joseph Wright)*

The following figures are additional examples of opportunities we used in class for feedback,

reflection and self-assessment. The first is part of a **"feedback attack"** that I ask the students to

perform on each other a few times on several different components of their project.

Figure 8.   Feedback Attack Excerpt

Feedback Attack! This is for my ‾‾‾‾‾‾ **re:** ‾‾‾‾‾‾
                                        (product)   (my community)
While participating in the **Feedback Attack**, visit with at least **4 other groups.** Answer the following questions:
Attack #1: Feedback giver(s), list your name(s) here:‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾

+2 ♥s: Write down at least **2 positive things / "♥s"** that you liked / thought were good from seeing their product!

• I really liked your "Waffle love" building!
• The details were awesome! Loved the mini waffles!

+1 ★: Write down at least **1 thing / "★"** that you noticed they might improve on. Be nice. Offer suggestions!

• I didn't see a "product Bio" yet; have
you done that part?

Here the students are required to share two or more "hearts" or things they liked about the peer's project, and at least one "wish" or things they believe they could improve on (Source: Joseph Wright)

Besides that, we had other various activities throughout the project to allow the students to **assess** and reflect on their own work. One that was very effective was a bellringer where the students explored the final project that a student from a previous semester had submitted for their self-guided tour. I asked them to look through it, and then as a table discuss the good and the bad of the assignment. The following figures show both a screengrab of the assignment (see: https://goo.gl/J2Lvvf to check the entire assignment out if you'd like) as well as what we wrote on the board as part of our class assessment and discussion of the assignment (which modeled some of the "dos and don'ts" of their self-guided tour assignment).

Figure 9.   Self-Guided Tour Example: BYU Campus
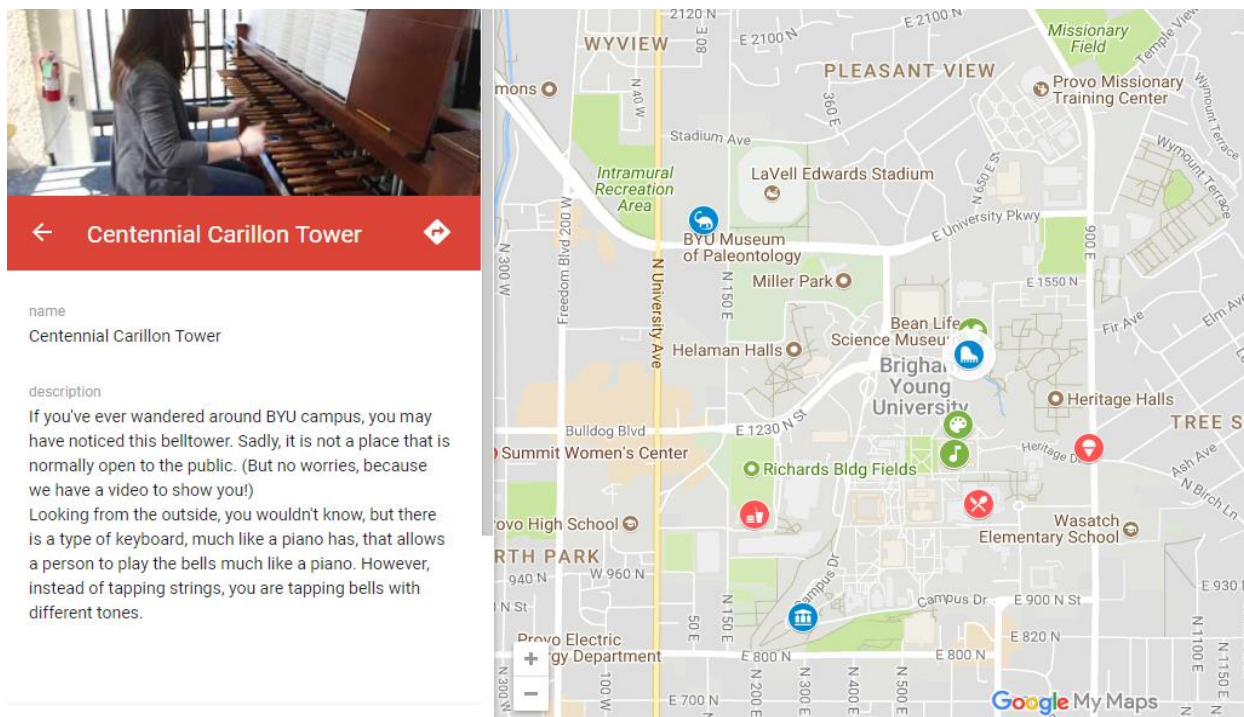
Here is a screengrab of a previous students' final self-guided tour assignment, which (with the students' permission) we used as an example in class to assess and give feedback on (Source: Joseph Wright)

Figure 10.   Class Assessment Notes of Self-Guided Tour
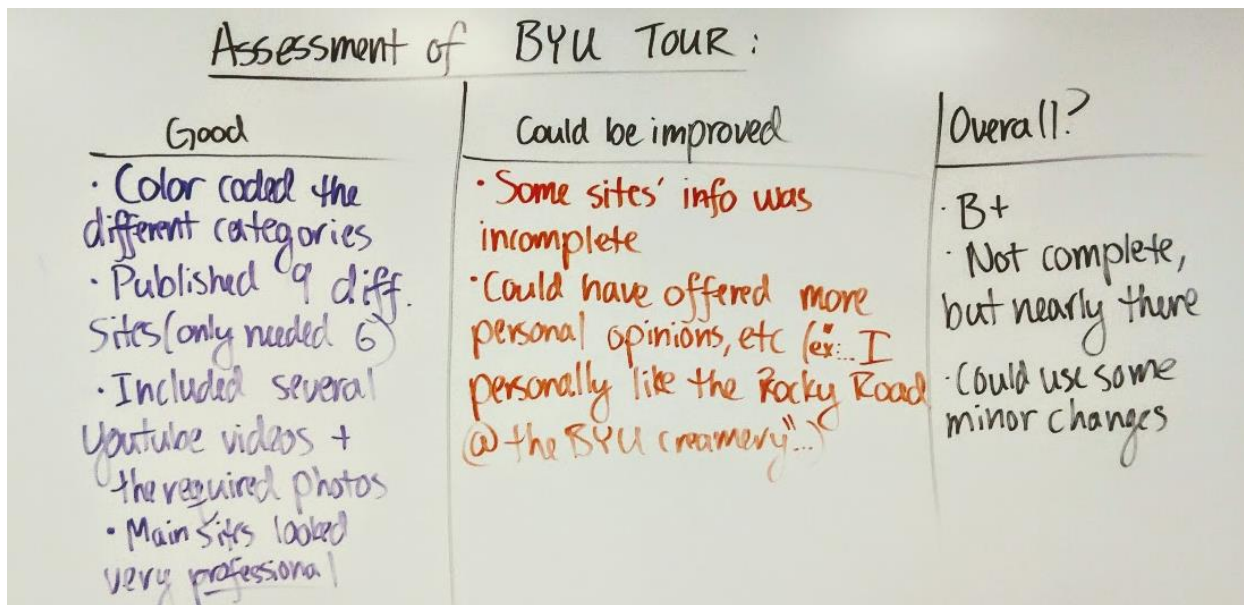
Above you can see the notes from our class critiquing a former student's work (Source: Joseph Wright)

As these examples illustrate, as an educator I have attempted to address the issue of **assessment** in a balanced manner. As we progress in class, I am constantly checking for understanding from the students, clarifying questions or inconsistencies that I am noticing, and giving the students the chance to demonstrate that they truly do understand the objectives, standards, skills and curriculum that we are attempting to teach them. Sometimes it can be a swing and a miss, and that is fine. One of the primary reasons we carry out assessment is to verify that the classwork and student learning we are engaging in is "[fiting] within the context of [the] objectives, standards, and criteria that we bring to it" (Wiggins, 2002). This is why "**backwards design**" is a key component of good teaching, and also PBL. It means creating curriculum and learning with the end goal in mind, and realizing that while the journey is certainly important and valuable, the final destination is crucial as well.

Standard 6: Planning

This standard, according to the **EYE Brochure**, requires that we teachers **"[plan] instruction** to **support students** in meeting **rigorous learning goals** by drawing upon knowledge of **content areas**, Core Curriculum **standards**, instructional **best practices**, and the **community context**" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 2). As you have already seen, I strive to meet this standard of excellence in my own classroom. Figure 7 (Hometown Hero PBL Project Outline) is an example of this. Another class I worked heavily on improving my planning and organization for this year was my **World Geography Class**. Figure 11 shows just a snippet of the efforts I've made there to better organize that class by creating a comprehensive **Scope and Scale Document** for the class (refer to **Appendix A**: **World Geography Curriculum Project**).

Figure 11.   World Geography Scope & Sequence Excerpt

```
|Unit   |Topic  |Lesson|Goals  |Objec. |HW, Assessment, etc.
    Ch. 3 Earth's Human & Cultural Geography | T1D11 – T1D15
        3.1 World Population | T1D11
            Understand the where and why of population changes | WG 1.3, 2.1-3
                Compare and contrast areas where population growth is occurring, and where it is in fact shrinking
                Illustrate the differences in population density, and hypothesize about its relationship to population movement
                    Discuss as a class terms such as death rate and birth rate, and why certain trends exist
                    Informal Assessment: look at U.S. Population Data and compare it via Google Public Data Explorer, esp. local places
                Examine what factors are involved in population change, and the challenges these present
                    Hypothesize as to challenges that population change can bring, as well as potential solutions.
                    Consider the example of cold climate grapes (https://youtu.be/G7iiqzNSES8) or CRISPR (https://youtu.be/UfA_jAKV29g)
                Dissect population movement, especially the push / pull factors that play into this subject
                    Informal: create a T-chart on the whiteboard and discuss push and pull factors
                    Extra Credit: Research Population Change, Placement or Movement & Present Findings
```

*Here is just one small excerpt of one part of the **scope and sequence** document outlining my **World Geography Class** (Source: Wright, 2018)*

Over the summer, I am planning on doing the same for my other classes that I've previously taught, such as **Utah Studies** and **U.S. History I**. While it is a lot of work to do so, it makes it obvious to anyone what **goals** and **objectives** we have in my class, and how what they are doing is connected to the specific Core Curriculum Standards, thus better meeting state requirements and helping me as a teacher to focus on enriching my teaching, rather than scrambling to cover just the basics like I seemed to be doing the first year I taught.

Another way that I am attempting to be a better **planner** and to stay organized is by **inviting the public** to participate in our learning and seeing the work that our students are accomplishing here at Merit Academy. For example, I have a **class website** that is useful to both **students** and **parents** in helping them know what is occurring, and if they missed something, what they need to do to get caught up. You can see that at www.mrwrightmerit.weebly.com. Additionally, I've made a concerted effort to **invite other community members** to participate in our learning. I've been working the past two years with the **Utah Valley Convention Center** here in our area, which is contracted by the state to handle **local tourism**. They have helped make our **Utah Valley Hometown Hero PBL Project** in my Utah Studies class **authentic** and **relevant** by visiting the students at the launch of the project, and explaining how what they were doing was closely related to their day-to-day jobs. It was a win-win, because they were getting

free publicity, and the students were getting excited about tourism, with a few students

expressing interest in perhaps working in that field as a career!

Figure 12.   PBL Public Event Announcement

*This announcement was created by me to promote our PBL Learning in the community, with an online application called "**lucidpress**", which I have also shared and given instruction on to the students in class. As you can see, it produces a very professional and nice looking product. (Source: Wright, 2018)*

I've also worked hard to help the students **develop their own planning / reflection skills**, which is another important **lifelong skill**. Figure 13 illustrates an example of this, as part of the Utah Studies PBL, I asked that they continually be **reflecting** on what they have been working on and accomplishing, as well as **making personal plans** to complete the rest of their assignment. It is a tall order, as the students are required to complete several interlinking components into one final presentation, but I believe they were more successful as a result.

Figure 13.   Journal Reflection & Planning Excerpt for Hometown Hero PBL

Here is evidence of student reflection and planning, which was a required part of their final project in my Utah Studies class. I am confident the students emerged better organized and able to carry out other such projects in the future as a result (Source: Wright, 2018)

Standard 7: Instruction & Learning

The seventh standard of the USBE's effective teaching standards says: "The teacher uses **various instructional strategies** to ensure that all learners develop a deep **understanding** of

content areas and their connections, and **build skills** to **apply** and **extend knowledge** in **meaningful ways**." ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 3). Over the 5 years or so that I have been teaching in the classroom, I have found that students learn in a variety of ways and have various strengths, as identified by Gardner in his book about **Multiple Intelligences** (2006), and referred to by many others elsewhere (Cherry, 2018). I have personally utilized many different methods / protocols based on his ideas to make our classroom more engaging to students.

One of the methods that works well is the **think-pair-share**. This is a standard tool in most teachers' toolkits, yet I think it is an invaluable one. Students are encouraged to consider a question / topic (for example, "What changes were occurring in the U.S. during the early to mid-1800s. and what effect did they have?), and it is often a good idea to have them **write down** their thoughts to better organize them. Next, after the allotted time (usually 1-2 minutes or so), they then turn and share with a neighbor (a variation could be the **think-group-share**, with more people, say the 4 that all sit at the same table together), and discuss what they both came up with, or the table as a whole, etc.

After this, they then have a much better idea as a whole, having interpreted it their own way, and then having heard how others might interpret it, and discussing and sharing their ideas and thoughts. This **collaboration** is an important skill to have, and it aligns well with Gardner's **interpersonal intelligence**, where social experiences can be a valuable teaching skill. Certainly using the **think-pair-share** protocol provides a more **social experience**, but it also allows **self-reflection** as well as the use of **logic**, which relate to Gardner's **intrapersonal intelligence** and **logical-mathematical** intelligences, respectively (Cherry, 2018)

Of course, this is just one tool I utilize in class, but I do use it frequently. Another example of a way I try to incorporate many of these different skillsets at the same time occurs in my **U.S. History I** class, when we are talking about **Westward Expansion**. I give the assignment for the students to play the old-school **Oregon Trail Deluxe Version** from the 1990s. Though the graphics are atrocious by today's standards, the students enjoy the nostalgia and fun of older video games, and it creates a connection between them, their parents (many of whom are familiar with the blockbuster game), and the people who actually traveled, lived, and died along the real Oregon Trail.

Figure 14.   Oregon Trail Game & Worksheet

On the left is a screen grab from the game itself (found at www.archive.org), and the right is an excerpt from the worksheet assignment I require them to do in order to share what they've learned (Source: Wright, 2018)

Of Gardner's eight multiple intelligences, this assignment touches most of them. The graphics and sound, with its maps, hunting scenes, stories from travelers on the trail, folksy music, etc., speak to the students' **visual-spatial intelligence**, which emphasizes visual learning,

linguistic-verbal intelligence, whose strength lies in written and spoken material, and even a bit of their **musical intelligence.** When confronted with challenges, like disease, lack of food, a broken wheel, etc., they are forced to use their **logical-mathematical intelligence**, which focuses on **problem-solving skills**. As they discuss with each other what made their wagon party successful (or not), and consider the choices they made and their impact, they are strengthening their **interpersonal** and **intrapersonal skills / intelligences.**

One factor that is missing from Gardner's theory is that capricious, ethereal quality of "fun" learning, and I do my best to make our class activities include that. It is a tough thing to do, because what might be fun / engaging for one might bore another. I try to avoid this by offering **multiple options** for assignments, so that students can pick and choose what is most interesting to them. With our PBLs for instance, I have found that "**student voice** and **choice**" are incredibly important aspects of learning, and I only wish that my teachers growing up had been more aware of these concepts. I did have a few that made learning fun, and as I reflect on it, I realize it was in large part due to the fact that I had choices over my learning, and that played a big role in the fun factor. And so I attempt to allow my own students that same latitude, while also guiding their work to meet state standards and goals.

Standard 8: Reflection & Evidence-Based Teaching

The seventh of the USBE's effective teaching standards says: "The teacher is a **reflective practitioner** who uses **evidence** to **continually evaluate** and **adapt practice** to **meet** the **needs** of **each learner**." ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 3). This is actually one of my favorite standards, because it involves one of the most **crucial** of abilities that we teachers ought to have. As I was thinking about my own teaching practice and reflection, I read something that I thought was

profound. This article stated that "Through reflection, we as educators can look clearly at our **successes** and **struggles** and **consider options** for **change**" (Sanders, 2018). I agree with this sentiment, and believe that it is incredibly important.

This past year, I have been working on my Master's Degree in School Administration. I have been taking many different classes, which has afforded me the chance to consider my own teaching, and also observe the teaching of other teachers at my school. I spent several periods observing Mrs. Young this year, a veteran teacher here at our school, and it taught me some very valuable skills. I learned from her for instance the importance of **strict organization**. I'm a bit more laid-back in my own teaching style, but after hearing from students (we had a school wide survey near the end of the year), observing Mrs. Young, and personal reflection, I've come to agree that it is something I can and should implement more in my own classroom. I've already started making some such implementations, including classroom procedures, etc., and I plan to further implement stricter protocols this coming school year.

One tool that I also use often in class are **kahoots**, which are a form of **online quizzing**, and they are very helpful to my teaching, and the students find them fun, so win-win! These are a great way to analyze how ready students are for the chapter quizzes we do. If I find that the students are not where I expected them to be, we will take some time to review the material they are struggling with. If the students are able to meet a high enough threshold as a class (thus proving they know the material quite well), sometimes I'll simply give them the class score as the quiz grade, if they prefer! I plan on finding better and more useful ways of implementing this tool in the future, but having started using it this year, I found it useful and fun, and it should continue to be a utile educational tool in my class.

Figure 15.   Kahoot Quiz Screengrab
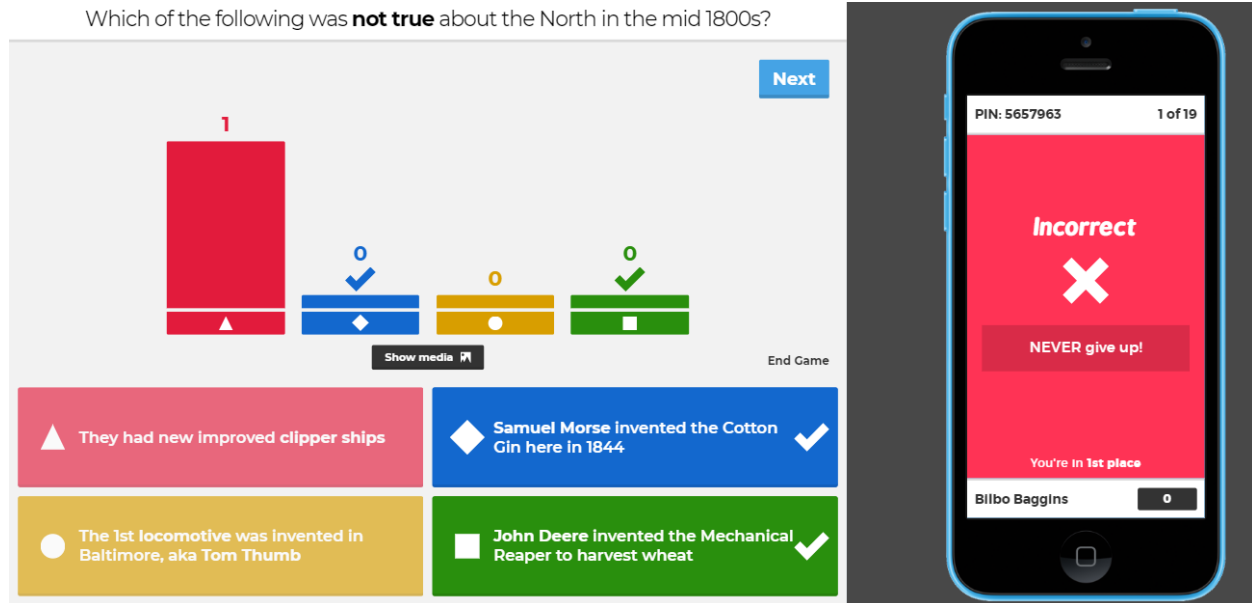
*Here is a screengrab of a **preview** that I can create to see just how the **kahoots** I am creating will appear to the students as they play them. It is a very useful tool that I utilize often to review, and sometimes preview the knowledge that students have about a subject, and provides useful knowledge to quickly see how well students may know a topic / subject (Source: Wright, 2018)*

When we finish a chapter or unit, I also try to make it a point to create an **exit ticket assignment** that asks the students what their **favorite thing** was about the past few lessons, and also if there was anything they **didn't like**, or might change if they could. This of course helps teach them **critical thinking skills**, but it also gives me a chance to see what my students are thinking, and helps me make decisions about future teaching. I keep in anonymous so that they can be as honest as possible, and though it can be painful, I still feel it is worth doing.

For instance, there have been several lessons / assignments that I have gotten rid of, because the students didn't like them! If the students are not having fun or enjoying class, then we have a problem. On the flipside, I have kept or improved on other assignments based on feedback from the students that they really enjoyed an assignment, and that is helpful too! This is another skill that I intend to build upon in my future teaching, and I am sure it will continue to provide invaluable feedback

Standard 9: Collaboration

The penultimate of these standards is summarized in this way: "The teacher is a **leader** who **engages collaboratively** with **learners**, **families**, **colleagues**, and **community members** to build a **shared vision** and **supportive professional culture** focused on student growth and success" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 3). As a teacher at a **public charter school**, I have been intimately familiar with the importance of working together with the community to make our school visible and successful. We have to fight for every dollar of funding that we receive, because those dollars come with each student. And though we receive state funds for each student that comes here, as charter schools we receive significantly less money per pupil than traditional public schools do ("Utah's Charter", 2016, p. 1), as figure 16 illustrates below.

Figure 16.   Charter School versus School District Funding in Utah

Per-Pupil K-12 Education Funding Comparison

	Per-Pupil Amounts		Charter Difference	
	Charters	**Districts**		
Total	$6,808	$7,604	-$796	-10%
Uncomparable Programs	585	697	-113	-16%
Total, Minus Uncomparable Programs	6,224	6,907	-683	-10%

As this graphic shows, while the spending is somewhat close, charter schools have to make do with less compared with regular public school districts (Source: "Utah's Charter", 2016)

This has very real and clear implications for charter schools. We are fighting for each and every student, which bring with them precious dollars that fund our schools. We have "open enrollment", which means that students can attend any public school (including charter schools), and so we are truly in every sense competing with the other schools around to convince parents and students that they ought to pick Merit Academy before any other school option. We are

attempting as a school to be better about **community outreach** and to "sell" ourselves as the best choice for these students. And one major way we are attempting to do this is through **Project / Problem Based Learning,** aka **PBL.**

We began this transition to PBL in earnest this year at our charter school. It is overall a dynamic change in the way we are teaching in our school. Our goals with this shift include using many **new technologies**. Over the past year, in my various classes, as we've been implementing this change, I've been utilizing **chromebooks** especially in helping the kids learn to utilize the **latest programs**, **apps**, and **technology skills** as they prepare for life beyond my classroom. I've also been utilizing tools like **Kahoot** combined with their smartphones / other smart devices, and introducing the students to different **web-based programs** (i.e. Weebly, Lucidpress, etc.) that allow them to expand their knowledge and skillset in an ever changing world, in an effort to not only help my own students, but also show prospective parents and students that we at Merit Academy are an ideal choice for their own education. As we have made these changes, I can already see a big difference in the level of comfort and skill our current students have as they are increasingly utilizing these new technologies, and our enrollment has surged going into this next year.

PBL also encourages a change of **teaching approach**, and steers away from the **"sage on the stage"** stereotype that is typical with many public schools and their direct instruction methods, and instead tries to remodel the us teachers as more of a **"guide on the side"**, who facilitate learning, but let students decide for themselves the direction and focus of their learning. Yes, we still have **state standards** that we must abide by, but instead of them being a hindrance, as they might appear, we've learned through PBL that we ought to instead **embrace them**. In

fact, it's the state standards that guide the **creation** of our projects, and thus far, I've been impressed with the changes that we've made, both as a school and in my own classroom.

Other ways that I have been considering getting more people to check out our school or to be more involved is to make the **demonstrations** of our **projects** / **products public**. I've held numerous public events throughout the year for each of my classes, and the students have had a lot of fun participating! We've made competitions out of it, with awards, treats, food, and prizes as part of the entire presentation! They've shown off poster boards, websites, brochures, and other "tangibles" (such as models of famous buildings, landmarks, or native recipes, dressing in the native attire, etc.) that they've created which help all who attend the event better see, feel, and experience the learning they've been doing! The students in the process also get to show off the great stuff they have learned and created, and their parents, friends and the community at large get the chance to visibly appreciate in the great things that we are doing here at Merit!

I've found that by simply **communicating** better with the community (see Figure 17, which is another example of collaboration between myself, other teachers, and the community at large), we are making a positive difference. I've written many letters to the parents, so that they are aware of what is going on, and can catch the enthusiasm that we have for the changes that are occurring. Finally, I have a class website (see: www.mrwrightmerit.weebly.com) that lets the students and parents know what is going on in our class, and is accessible anywhere. Many parents have told me how grateful they are for this resource, and though it requires a lot of personal time to maintain and upkeep, I'll continue to do so as long as it proves to be useful and keep us and the community connected. Those that have responded have been positive in their reception, so things seem to be working!

Figure 17.   PBL Poster Collaboration Effort
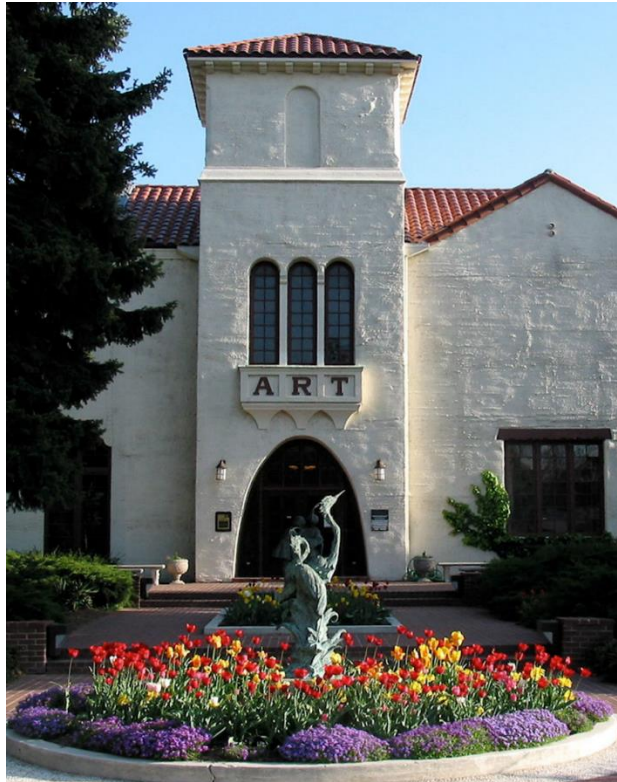
We combined our forces between Utah Studies and Art class to create a fun Christmas themed school event to foster community engagement and also demonstrate student learning (Source: Wright, 2018)

Standard 10: Ethical Conduct

The last of these standards is summarized in this way: "The teacher demonstrates the **highest** standard of **legal**, **moral**, and **ethical conduct** as specified in Utah State Board Rule R277-515 (pp 2-3)" ("Utah's Support", 2018, p. 3). As a teacher, we have been given an incredible trust: we are charged with the **safety**, **welfare**, and **education** of the rising generation. I for one take this responsibility very seriously. We have to be incredibly careful however, because sexual harassment, among other things, is a serious problem, not just for any potential victims, but also anyone accused will suffer the consequences. I have strived since becoming a teacher to always have the **highest standards** both for **myself** & my **students**. My observations of other teachers (see Appendix B) have given me some great ideas on how to accomplish this.

We educators are examples for our students, and ought to maintain the highest standards of **appearance**, **behavior, attitude** and **professionalism** in our interactions with them and with each other. Anything I do, say, or think at school or in any role related to my job is done with this in mind. As part of this, I work to maintain accurate records, not only of the students and their work, but also of any incidents or situations that may be of concern, such as an unpleasant interaction with a student, etc. I have written to a student's parents on several occasions, as well as talked with guidance counselors, supervisors, and other concerned adults about situations or things said or observed in class, all in an effort to make sure that all of my students can enjoy an environment of safety and learning.

In my opinion, it is best to simply follow the Biblical maxim **"Abstain from all appearance of evil"** (1 Thessalonians 5:22, KJV). Any action I take in class, I consider this. For instance: if a student is excited and wants to give me a hug for whatever reason, I instead give

them a high five (hugs can be considered awkward and sometimes of a sexual nature, so best to avoid them), or any other action suggested as suitable in the Utah Educator Professional Standards ("Utah Administrative Code", 2018). Anything that might appear or could possibly lead to impropriety, I simply won't do. Best not to go down that road, and like I said, if we avoid any appearance of unseemliness, we, the school, and the students are much less likely to get involved in any perceived offense.

I work fastidiously to ensure that my classroom, my behavior and appearance, etc., all project a sense of professionalism, compassion and stick-to-itiveness that ought to be found in a classroom. My students know that any untoward behavior, from anyone, is not tolerated in the least degree in my classroom. My role as an educator is to provide guidance, leadership, counsel and expertise both inside and beyond the classroom. My classroom provides a respite from the storm of life that allows students to feel secure, respected, safe, and acknowledged, while simultaneously being a hotbed for critical thinking, synthesis and personal growth as they learn. I strive to provide a classroom environment that leaves each student feeling respected and respectful of their peers.

I am there to introduce new ideas, thoughts, and content that many of my students are only vaguely familiar with, and it is my role to help them learn and apply it both in the past, present and also the future. My role also includes having high expectations for my students, and helping them reach those heights, while also stretching themselves and their abilities, despite the varying levels each of my students may be at. I present my lessons utilizing a variety of methods and techniques and technologies, making sure that many/all learning styles are respected and addressed in my classroom. While I am still not perfect, these are my goals, and I will continue to pursue them in what I hope is a long and fruitful educational career.

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