

Managing Resources Online

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One afternoon in early February, 2000 I found myself watching The Oprah Winfrey Show. The title of this particular episode was "Does High School Do More Harm Than Good". This of course appealed to me because I had been teaching in a traditional private high school for over 20 years. I was beginning to question whether or not I wanted to continue my career as a teacher or find something new to do with my life. Leon Botstein, president of Bard College was a guest on Oprah that day. He was discussing his book "Jefferson's Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture." I was especially taken by his comments about the state of high school education in this country and his thoughts on how to reform the educational system. At the end of the show I remember saying to myself that I would love to teach in the kind of school outlined by Dr. Botstein. Well...watch out what you pray for you just might get it. A little over 18 months after that episode aired I found myself teaching in a NYC public school started in collaboration with Bard College. My prayers had been answered.

Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) is a collaborative effort between Bard College and the New York City Department of Education. We are a four-year public institution that enables our students to earn both a New York State high school diploma and an Associate Degree in Liberal Arts conferred by Bard College. Our academic program is quite rigorous. Our students are expected to complete the requirements for their high school diploma by the end of the tenth grade. Students spend their last two years taking a liberal arts curriculum established by Bard College. Successful completion of 60 credits with a minimum GPA of 2.0 will result in the awarding of an Associates Degree in Liberal Arts from Bard College.

You may ask how is this possible. Well, I have to say that the success of BHSEC is due to the combined efforts of a dedicated and talented faculty, students that are motivated to learn, and an Administration committed to fostering intellectual curiosity and development. BHSEC provides students from all walks of life with the opportunity to engage in an academic program that inspires and challenges them to become life long learners and independent thinkers.

This is now my 28th year of teaching high school science. I believe that my role as an educator is to empower students to become actively and assiduously involved in the learning process. It is vitally important to provide an environment that is student-centered and challenges them to take responsibility for their own learning. I see myself as a facilitator that creates the environment most conducive to learning. Small group instruction, problem-based activities and incorporation of technology make learning science a more enjoyable experience for my students.

The nature of my teaching has changed dramatically since I first walked into a classroom back in 1979. Back then I had a class size of 30 to 34 students and relied heavily on the chalk and talk method of instruction. Now I enjoy small class sizes at BHSEC and can successfully incorporate

technology into my lessons. There is an abundance of tutorials, animations, and simulations available on the Internet. I have been able to utilize these Internet resources to help students concretize the principles and concepts we are exploring in class.

In the last five years I have incorporated a growing number of Internet based resources into my lessons. I had to find a way to make these resources available to my students outside the classroom. I also wanted to find a more effective mechanism to communicate information not only to my students but their parents as well. I have found that when the parents of my students take an active part in their child's education, that child has a better chance of succeeding in my class. Basically I was searching for a way to create an online classroom that would enable me to communicate more effectively with my students and their parents.

It was in September of 2005 that I first began to use eChalk to manage my online resources and extend my reach beyond the classroom. eChalk has become a vital part of my instructional program. In the Resources section of my class page I am able to post class work activities, and laboratory, homework, and reading assignments that students can download and print from home. I am also able to create links to various online tutorials and animations that I use in class. Posting these links prior to class enables students to have more time on task. Many of my students use these online tutorials to prepare for quizzes and exams. In addition, many of my students have commented that using the tutorials along with the other classroom resources deepen their understanding of the principles and concepts presented in class.

When preparing internet-based lessons, I am most concerned that students maximize their time on task. Having a central place to post websites upon which the activity is based enables students to transition more quickly into the lesson. Most recently students were expected to complete a tutorial on the central dogma of molecular biology; the transfer of information encoded in the DNA and its subsequent translation into protein. The lesson was based on tutorials from the [BioCoach](#). The instructions at the beginning of the assignment directed students to the DNA tutorials found in the Resources section of my class webpage. From there, students were able to access the transcription and translation tutorials found on the BioCoach site.

I am most amazed at the response I get from the parents of my students. Parents are very interested in what is going on in their child's classroom. They use the eChalk page I have set up for my class to keep track of their child's assignments and assessments. Some parents have also found the tutorials and animations beneficial when helping their child prepare for exams and quizzes. One parent said to me that by viewing the tutorials they were learning science all over again.

I could never have imagined how much my teaching would change in the last 28 years. The advent of the Internet and an abundance of information on the Web provides me with greater flexibility in designing my lessons. The resources I use in class and from the Internet enable me to foster and develop the intellectual curiosity of my students. eChalk has enabled me to engage students both in and out of the classroom. It has also become a way for parents to become more actively engaged in their child's academic life.