A Student-centered Teaching Approach

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When elementary students come to my classroom, they have myriad preconceptions about the world around them and how it works. Every student that I teach is almost certainly a "novice" in some areas of learning while simultaneously being an "expert" in one or more areas of learning. Learning with understanding cannot be achieved unless teachers challenge or engage with a student's initial understanding about something. In order to learn, it is important for students to organize knowledge in ways that they can apply to their own lives and facilitate retrieval. When students can take control of their own learning, they are often more engaged and interested in what they are learning.

I want my computer science and technology class to be highly enjoyable for students, but I need it to "matter" to them as well! As an elementary subject, computer science or "technology" is often overlooked by parents and students as a class that doesn't really matter. Due to the fact that I am not a "classroom" teacher at my elementary school, some parents do not regularly interact with me. Most parents do not actively seek to find out what is happening in their son's or daughter's computer class. Part of my job as a computer science and technology teacher is to make my students aware of the fact that my "computer topics" will impact their lives. I believe the technology skills and knowledge that I am teaching my students will become highly crucial for their futures. They will need to learn how to communicate online, how to be safe online, how to think critically and solve problems, and many more valuable lessons. My teaching vision closely aligns with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards, which is all about teaching students to become more empowered learners.

Almost every year I attend at least one statewide educational technology conference to learn more about the newest classroom technology trends and topics. It is overwhelming to think about all of the technology lessons that I could be implementing in my elementary tech room: coding, digital citizenship, blogging, "Mystery Skyping", typing, email pen pals, Google Classroom, and so many more. That said, I teach many of these topics but I am also working hard to use my students' own interests to drive my lessons. As I move forward, I continue to work on letting go of "constant control" while I am teaching. My latest teaching philosophy more closely resembles being a "guide on the side" instead of a "sage on the stage".

When looking at the International Society for Technology in Education standards for teachers, we read that all teachers should "facilitate and inspire student learning and creativity" (ISTE, 2008). This standard set for teachers in the digital age suggests that we should be using our skills and knowledge to help our students create powerful learning experiences *on their own*. As a teacher, I know now that I have to be willing to let my students try things by themselves. I have

to let my students make mistakes. Many times, the only way to learn something new is to fail at first. My job as a teacher is to guide students along their "educational journey" as they try, fail, and eventually gain new knowledge and skills. In addition to learning from mistakes, it is often said that the *best learning* is done through *teaching*. Knowing this, I need to continue letting my students explore, create, make mistakes, share, and teach one another in a collaborative matter.

Reference:
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). (2008). Standards for teachers. Retrieved from http://www.iste.org/standards/standards/standards-for-teachers