UNIT 10: REPORTING SPEECH

Interview with Chris Mitchell, Science Teacher in Korea



We recently interviewed Chris Mitchell, a teacher of ninth-grade Physical Science, eleventh-grade Chemistry and twelfth-grade Physics teacher in Seoul, South Korea. Chris attended Mount Vernon Nazarene University, where he earned a B.S. in Physical Science Education. He has been teaching for three years. During our interview, 1. we discussed Chris' philosophy of education, the aspects of his job that he finds the most challenging, and finally, what Chris knows now that he wished he had known during his first year of teaching.

2. What is a typical day like for you?

I teach at a Christian international school, so a typical day consists of a morning staff prayer meeting, followed by a six-period day of varying classes (there are only enough students for one physics period, etc.) and usually two planning periods. 3. After-school time consists of meeting with students who need extra help and/or conducting quiz makeups for standards-based grading.

4. How would you describe your philosophy of education?

My philosophy is that students need to learn science (and other subjects as well) just like they learn a sport, or a hobby or any other skill – through the use of mistakes. It is my belief that students need the room to make mistakes in their learning, and receive enough feedback to learn how to correct their mistakes to be most successful and maximize learning. Also, 5. I believe that students need to learn to be aware of what they know, what they don't know, and how to get to achieve a greater mastery of knowledge. Standards-based-grading is the tool that allows me to facilitate this type of learning with my students.

6. What aspects of your job do you find most challenging, and how do you overcome them?

The most challenging part of my job is the constant diversity of classes. Working at a small school makes it especially difficult for me to juggle the many different targets and goals for each class since every period throughout the day consists of a different concept area.

7. To overcome these difficulties, I have found myself to be a much more organized educator. I keep diligent (yet simple) lesson plans for every class, every day. Honestly though, my current responsibilities have forced me to learn better organization skills, as well as how to work smart, rather than work hard.

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8. What have you most enjoyed about being a teacher?

I love interacting with students on a daily basis. 9. I truly enjoy being around young people and having the opportunity to speak to them words of encouragement and positive affirmation. I find that many students really appreciate my teaching style and personality and this allows me to remain professional and really have fun with all of my students. That is the best part about my job – the influence I have and the fun I have doing it!

Science can be a challenging subject for some learners. 10. How do you make your lessons engaging and fun for students and also relevant to their lives?

Science content is only strengthened by relevancy and shock factor. I've spent a great deal of time and energy learning interesting facts, finding demonstrations, as well as designing lessons around these aspects of science to rope the learners in. This works on some level, but ultimately 11. I've found the more that I gain the students' attention and respect, the more they are willing to open up about the content that I teach and be motivated to learn. And this makes all the difference.

12. What do you know now, that you wish you had known during your first year of teaching?

I wish I had known and been taught more about standards-based grading, research-based teaching and assessing methods. As I have researched more about these, my teaching has improved and I've learned more effective ways to teach and assess. 13. My students' grades are better, they are learning more and they are having a much more enjoyable time in my class.

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