

## Why I Hate the Phrase “In the Real World...”

By: Christopher Watson

When I have conversations about curriculum, rigor, depth of knowledge, behavior, expectations or even athletics, I am very often confronted with the phrase where someone begins with “Well, in the real world...”, thus implying that whatever happens at school is not relevant nor does it apply to anything else. I get frustrated with this comment because of how much I know that teachers prepare students for life outside the classroom. The phrase “in the real world” implies that schools are silos, unto themselves, and have no applicable relevance to the rest of the community. It also implies that schools operate in a completely different way than the rest of the community and therefore, students will be unprepared for life after schooling. This couldn’t be further from the truth, especially here at Visitation School.

One cannot argue that there is a large amount of knowledge that must be mastered between Junior Kindergarten and when our students graduate in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and move on to the high schools of their choosing. However, we strive to do something else; to teach our students to critically apply skills learned in the classroom to other situations. This ability to transfer skills to other situations will create successful individuals well adept to solving situations outside the classroom. At its core, this “transfer of learning” is simply critical thinking. Being able to take content, skills and strategies learned in one setting or situation and being able to know when and how to apply it to any other needed situation can be very difficult.

It is not the goal of our English classes to have our students pass the test, but rather to be life long and effective writers and readers who can communicate clearly and successfully. It is not the goal of our social studies classes to have our students memorize dates and events. Rather, it is the goal to understand historical perspectives that can be used to shape their decisions and opinions about current event and the future. We want our students in science class to know that doing an “egg drop” lab is not just about keeping an egg from cracking, but rather that there are external variables that must be accounted for and that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Those are the transferable skills.

If done enough times over the 10-year span that we have the opportunity of teaching our students, these life skills become second nature. Our graduates leave Visitation ready and able to speak, read and write with conviction. They are able to learn from the past in order to make decisions about the future. Our graduates master the scientific method, can understand cause and effect and use the scientific method to answer new scientific inquires. They also are able to know how and when to apply algebraic and geometric skills from within a text and use them to build, engineer, create and solve new problems.

The fact is that we as educators cannot prepare students for every single life situation...it’s just impossible. We cannot even prepare the students for specific jobs in the future, because they haven’t even been invented yet! The top 10 most in-demand jobs in 2015 did not even exist in 2005. It is important to note that the students who eventually got hired into those positions had the ability to take what they learned as a student and transfer those skills to new situations and environments.

Since we cannot prepare our students for jobs that don’t yet exist and because we can’t predict and teach them how to handle every single life situation, it is our responsibility as educators and parents to teach our students critical thinking skills and provide them opportunities to use the knowledge learned in school and transfer those skills to various and different settings. This is the key to successfully educating students that can thrive in the world outside the classroom.