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Features

February 1, 2006

Model students: Area teacher sold on team-learning process

By COLLEEN FREYVOGEL

Ray Trybus, a science teacher at Portage Area High School, is partial to Peer-Led Team Learning.

"In the Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) model there are some students who will get things quicker and they will help direct the other students," he said.

Peer-Led Team Learning (PLTL) is an approach that provides an active learning environment, creates leadership opportunities and engages the instructor in a new way of teaching, Trybus said.

In his teaching model, Trybus introduces a lesson topic at the beginning of a class. Then, his students are expected to follow directions and engage in hands-on activities to learn that lesson.

For the past five years, he has used this model to introduce his lessons. The teaching model is widely used in high schools and colleges around the country.

"The reason I like it is because I think it's more engaging to the students and it gets them actively involved in learning the materials," he said.

"Instead of just sitting back and going through lecture discussions, they are interacting with the concepts and learning from that interaction."

Trybus said the idea behind the model is to have students retain knowledge instead of memorizing the material.

"Sometimes they do not even realize that they are retaining the material," he said.

"With the PLTL approach, it locks it in better for them, and it becomes a part of them."

Sheridee Wills, 16, said Trybus takes a different approach to teaching than most of her instructors.

Wills, a junior at Portage Area, said many classes are lecture-based and require a lot of note taking.

"This class, you absorb it," she said. "With this, you have it right in front of you and you're absorbing (the information) by reading it."

"Hands-on work helps you absorb the material and reinforce it."

She said Trybus' course was difficult for her initially because she was not used to the class format.

"I learned that his way of teaching is a lot better for me because I am learning how to learn on my own," Wills said. "It was hard at first, but now it is helping me with all of my other classes."

Breanna Kunko, 16, a junior, said Trybus is preparing them for college.

"You learn how to study on your own," she said.

Karla Schrist, 16, also a junior, said she has learned to be self-reliant through Trybus' style of teaching.

"You don't have to worry about second-guessing yourself," she said. "He helps you find the answers on your own."

Junior Courtney Maloney, 17, said she has incorporated the study methods from Trybus' class



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into her other classes.

"It's good because you can figure it out for yourself," she said. "If you have questions, instead of asking a teacher, you can find it yourself."

One way Trybus includes hands-on learning is through the use of microscopes and laptop computers.

Students in his anatomy and physiology classes and biology courses use technology to teach themselves.

Trybus has 14 digital microscopes and 20 laptop computers available to students for their lessons.

"This age group I love because you can really sink your teeth into the subject matter," he said. "They are now at the stage in their lives where they are blossoming as thinkers."

"We can go beyond the fundamentals," Trybus said. "They are at that stage when some of them really start to take off."

Digital microscopes, worth about \$1,500 each, have internal cameras that allow students to take pictures of their slides. With the digital images, students are then able to import the photographs into a laptop for inclusion with their assignments.

Trybus said students are able to produce in-depth projects using technology.

Trybus also uses a SMARTBoard, which is an interactive whiteboard, in his classroom to help students with their assignments. Trybus can place information on the SMARTBoard for group discussion.

He said the technology in his classroom allows students more opportunities to succeed.

Eric Zelanko, the district's director of curriculum and technology, said having technology in the classrooms creates student attentiveness.

"Our school board is committed to technology and they see the value of it," he said. "If it's something that benefits the kids, we will find the money for it."

Zelanko said SMARTboards cost between \$3,000 and \$4,000 each, and many of the core classrooms in the district have one.

"For us, technology is ingrained in our curriculum, it's almost second nature," he said. "The science department is probably the best example of that."

He said technology reinforces the teaching standards.

Students and parents can also log onto the Portage Area School District Web site to download material for homework assignments, he said.

Trybus is a graduate of Penn Cambria High School, Cresson, St. Francis University, Loretto, and the United States Sports Academy in Daphne, Ala. He has been a teacher at Portage Area High School for 19 years.

Previously, he taught at Bishop Guilfoyle High School, Altoona, for six years.

He said he enjoys the small classes at Portage because that allows him to give students individual attention.

His largest class is about 24 students and his advanced courses only have a handful of students.

"That's one of the things I love about working at a smaller school," he said. "The smaller classes allow me to interact with all of the students for individual attention."

Trybus is also head of the district's science department, gifted program director, graduation project director and alumni coordinator.

"You wear a bunch of different hats when you work in a small school," he said. "It's fun and it keeps you hopping."

As head of the science department, Trybus coordinates curriculum and handles the budgeting and ordering of materials.

Trybus said his goal is to provide a smooth transition from preschool-age to senior-high science courses.

"I work to coordinate all programs so that we're not doing things differently," he said.

Colleen Freyvogel can be reached at 532-5055 or cfreyvogel@tribdem.com.



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Afraid of bats? 3 reasons to face your fears



As you head out trick-or-treating or to your costume parties on Halloween night, forget your fears about swooping bats sucking the blood from your neck.

November 1, 2013 2 Photos

VIDEO | Pit bulls, parolees join forces in Louisiana



The star of Animal Planet's "Pit Bulls and Parolees" moved her family and her show to New Orleans, where hurricanes and dog fighting have left animals abandoned and abused. The show pairs dogs with ex-convicts who work and care for them.

November 1, 2013 1 Photo

Rare Roman statue unearthed in London



Archeologists digging around the site of a future hotel complex in the City of London have made a rare discovery: a Roman statue of an eagle swallowing a snake.

November 1, 2013 1 Photo

Pizza via drone? Venture capital funding doubles in anticipation of multiple uses



Drones are moving from the military, where they've been used to spy on and kill suspected terrorists, to a range of civilian activities.

November 1, 2013 1 Photo

What's happening this weekend



November 1, 2013 1 Photo

VIDEO | Woman plans to hand out letters to 'moderately obese' trick-or-treaters



TV and radio stations out of Fargo, North Dakota are reporting that a local woman will not hand out candy to children she believes are 'moderately obese.' Instead she plans to give those kids a letter to take home to their parents which claims it is "irresponsible" to let them trick or treat.

October 31, 2013 1 Photo

How to get your lawn ready for winter



Autumn is the perfect time to do repair work on your lawn, which may have been stressed by the summer heat and may now be infested with unwanted weeds.

October 31, 2013 1 Photo

12 words you should stop using right now

If you want a list of words to incorporate into your conversation to make you sound more intelligent, this is not the place.

October 31, 2013

Electronic Arts parts ways with Tiger Woods



Electronic Arts Inc., the second-largest U.S. video-game publisher, has announced that Tiger Woods will no longer be associated with its golf title.

October 31, 2013 1 Photo

New stamp honors famous

What race has your interest in Tuesday's election?

City council, borough council, mayor or township supervisor

County row office, such as prothonotary or coroner

School board

Judge retention question

None of the above: I'm not going to vote.

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Grace hears the balance beam calling.

Meet Grace

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Allie - Disney Thomas, Founder

Grace hears the balance beam calling.

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