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Great Teachers

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Great teachers

According to Socrates, “Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.”

Linfield-educated teachers are fanning those flames in schools across the country from McMinnville to Gresham to the Bronx.

Three young alumni received major teaching honors and awards in the past six months. All three are making a difference in lives of students. And all three point to the inspiration and support they received at the hands of gifted faculty here, coupled with the broad liberal arts education that is the foundation of Linfield College.

Oregon Teacher of the Year

If it weren’t for a persistent mother, an understanding coach and a desire to study abroad, Michael Lindblad ’94 might be a professional baseball player or a lawyer instead of an award-winning high school teacher.

Lindblad, a Gresham High School social studies teacher and co-founder of the school’s International Baccalaureate Program (IB), was named Oregon High School Teacher of the Year in November, just a year after being named the Oregon Social Studies Teacher of the Year. He teaches global studies and IB History of the Americas, organizes humanitarian projects, has supervised 29 student teachers and taught at several universities.

Lindblad graduated with a double major in history and mass communication. Like many students, he chose Linfield because of the opportunity to combine academics with playing baseball. Professors such as Dave Gilbert (mass communication), Peter Buckingham (history) and Tom Love (anthropology), “made me think about the world outside of my little comfort zone of McMinnville and Portland,” Lindblad said.

It was his mother who insisted that he study abroad, a challenge for a dedicated athlete. Undaunted, she called then-baseball Coach Scott Carnahan ’73 to make the case for her son to spend a semester in England. Carnahan agreed, as long as Lindblad stayed in shape and played a sport while there. In between classes and serving as captain on the local basketball team, Lindblad traveled through Spain, Western Europe and Northern Africa – experiences that changed his life irrevocably.

“I started thinking about how I could open people’s minds to the world,” he said. Instead of law school, he enrolled in a master’s program at Lewis & Clark College and jumped into teaching.

His longing to improve his Spanish and work with Latino students brought him to Gresham High School some 15 years ago, after taking a Linfield summer class in Peru taught by Love. “I learned more than I ever imagined and I realized I wanted to work with Latino students, increase awareness of different cultures and use my Spanish to create more equity in the schools,” Lindblad said.

GHS, serving students from 20 countries, provided the diversity Lindblad sought and soon after his arrival he and two colleagues launched the rigorous IB program.

“We thought we could get a lot of our students taking this, which would help them understand their own culture,” Lindblad said. “In turn we could educate other students about Latin America and they might develop more cultural sensitivity which would help our school as a whole.”

Michael Lindblad ’94 talks with Christine Jacobsen, an intern from Concordia University, during a class at Gresham High School. A gifted teacher, Lindblad was named Oregon Teacher of the Year in November. He was a pitcher on the Linfield baseball team, and considered becoming a professional baseball player or an attorney. But a semester studying in England and the opportunity to travel through Spain, Western Europe and Northern Africa changed his life forever.
“Teachers were influential in shaping my life because they showed that leadership often involves putting others’ interests above your own. I often watched my teacher-coaches sacrifice many personal hours to help me achieve my academic or athletic dreams.”

—Michael Lindblad ’94

A former student describes Lindblad as engaging, passionate, selfless and challenging.

“He dedicated time and energy to the success of his students, challenging us to pursue excellence regardless of circumstances,” said Crystal Galarza ’13. “He always showed such enthusiasm. He cared about seeing us grow academically and in character as well. He taught with such joy that it made me excited to learn.”

Galarza said Lindblad always believed her college dreams were possible and his unwavering commitment helped when she enrolled at Linfield. The life experiences he shared from his Linfield days sparked her desire to learn about other cultures and views, so much so that she is pursuing a master’s in intercultural communication.

Having fun is central to Lindblad’s teaching. He turns learning into a game where students try to predict their essay questions and play a form of Jeopardy to review material. Students create art, play music, write and sing songs, make films and dress up like historical figures, bringing history to life in relatable ways. The classroom walls are a testament to the passion and creativity Lindblad brings to teaching, with a vibrant assortment of art: posters, sketches, collages featuring a variety of historical figures, a three-dimensional miniature phone booth, and even a timeline of the life of South American revolutionary Simón Bolívar.

“When I was in high school, we just opened the textbook and worked through questions,” he said. “I swore that if I ever taught, I would make it fun through projects, debates and discussions.”

Lindblad’s classes feature animated discussions and a heavy dose of writing that allow students to practice literacy skills while learning about history. He encourages students to take ownership of their learning by participating in student-led discussions that can be absolutely wild. Although it is hard to predict the direction the conversation may go, Lindblad noted that eight out of 10 remain on subject and he only allows himself one comment per topic.

“Too many teachers are leading discussions where they are interjecting too much,” he said. “Students need to be able to express their learning about social studies by selecting their own way to do it and by collaborating in professional real-world settings.”

A case in point is an innovative humanitarian program Lindblad implemented at GHS. Each year, students select a project and then go out into the community to raise funds for a local, national or international need. They learn how to create flyers and business plans, how to dress professionally and present themselves effectively so local businesses will take them seriously.

The project forces students to become global citizens by making connections between what they learn in class and how it applies to their local community, state and the world. They have raised funds for the victims of Hurricane Sandy, made dresses for children in Haiti, collected food donations to help soup kitchens, organized a concert to help victims of the Japanese earthquake, and organized numerous other projects.

“It’s getting them to think beyond Gresham or Oregon and think about Latin America or Europe or someplace else and to develop empathy for other people,” Lindblad said. “That is hard when you are 16 or 17.

“The most important thing I can teach my students is to chase their passion,” he said. “Find something they love in their life and go after it. And then thank the people who helped them along the way.”

The art of teaching

For Tim Love ’07, teaching is an art, not a science. Whether it’s using stuffed unicorns, creating geography games, or building a wall-sized map of the world with clocks from various time zones, Love is constantly finding ways to help make social studies interesting and relevant in his seventh grade classroom.

His methods may sometimes be unorthodox, but he gets results. And for that, he was named the 2014 Oregon 7-12 Teacher of the Year by the Oregon Council for the Social Studies.

When Tim Love ’07 steps into his seventh grade class at Dunway Middle School in McMinnville, he’s part magician, a bit of a gamer, a salesman, very much an artist and writer, and definitely an entertainer. He uses stuffed unicorns, a wall-sized map of the world, complete with clocks from a variety of time zones, and field trips to places like Medical Teams International to bring learning alive for his students. He was named the 2014 Oregon 7-12 Teacher of the Year by the Oregon Council for the Social Studies.
By the numbers

Linfield alumni currently working in the education field:

Primary/secondary teachers/coaches 1,469

* Others working at primary/secondary level 287

College/university professors/coaches 297

* Others working at college/university level 93

Linfield alumni in the McMinnville School District

Teachers 26 percent (103)

Administrators 18 percent (4)

* Individuals working in non-academic positions

Love, a teacher at Duniway Middle School in McMinnville for five years, said that in order to engage with today’s students, you must understand what will catch their attention so they explore it on their own.

“When I see something really dumb or really fun, I realize that I can use it as a hook to capture a kid’s interest,” Love said. That’s how the unicorns ended up in his classroom and he uses them as a learning tool.

Love said the “stand and deliver” style of teaching doesn’t work with today’s students who are surrounded by distractions from technology and social media.

As educators, teachers must find the most effective way to connect education to subjects that students are interested in, Love said. If teachers can generate interest in those ideas and concepts, they will help those students become lifelong learners.

It is not all just fun and games. One of the most powerful parts of his curriculum is a field trip to the Medical Teams International “Real. Life. Exhibit.” It recreates a series of disasters around the world, such as the Southeast Asia tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and the Haitian earthquake, and displays stories of children affected by disaster, conflict and poverty. After viewing the exhibit, Love divides the students into groups, takes them to a grocery store and with just $2 per group, they have to find enough food for all of them to live on for one day.

“It’s a way to talk about how the world operates and to create empathy for people who are suffering, as well as awareness for events elsewhere,” Love said. “They don’t think about people in the Sudan hiding from the militia because it’s not part of their world. But bringing that to them gives them an understanding.”

He devotes the last two weeks of every school year to Geography Games, where all the geography and history they have studied is reviewed through a series of games. Students have fun and compete for prizes, but they also learn and remember concepts they have studied throughout the year.

Love credits his success to the support and mentoring he receives at Duniway, led by Cathy Carnahan ’73, the 2010 national middle school principal of the year, and to the liberal arts education he received at Linfield. He cited professors Brian Winkenweder (art), Steve Bernheisel (education) and David Sumner and Ken Ericksen (English) for fueling his passion, providing unconditional support and teaching him how to apply almost anything to his own life.

“Being able to tap into any subject, whether it is science, history or geography and incorporate it into your language arts curriculum is beneficial,” he said. “The broader your understanding of the world, the more you can inspire passion in those fields. As a teacher it’s been invaluable to have that broad foundation. The art of teaching is something that Linfield emphasized and prepared me for.”

Teaching sustainable technologies

A passion for environmental sustainability has grown from an interest to a teaching career and is now a mission for Nathaniel Wight ’99, founding teacher of the Bronx Design and Construction Academy.

For his efforts, Wight earned the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators. Wight said the $2,000 award will allow him to focus much more on creating and managing projects that teach about environmental sustainability.

“I’m motivated to teach our youth about sustainable technologies; after all, many solutions to environmental problems will be addressed by generations after us, through education,” said Wight. He, along with his students, installed an 1,800-square-foot green roof on the school in 2011 and developed an ecology class that uses it for educational purposes.

The academy, serving some of the poorest students in the country, educates high school students about the connections between sustainable technology and real-world environmental issues. It opened in 2011 with 110 students and is now at capacity with 625 students.

Students learn about economics and the environment and how they relate to the building trades such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry, heating, ventilation, pre-engineering and more. Wight helped found the high school to prepare youth for high-level secondary education and post-secondary employment. Students graduate with endorsed diplomas and are able to surpass union apprenticeship requirements and land highly-skilled and high-paying jobs in the building trades.

Wight and the Bronx Design and Construction Academy have received other awards including the prestigious $100,000 Zayed Future Energy Prize for the Americas region, one of only five schools recognized in the world. The prize is being used to build the Energy Environment Research Center.
Nathaniel Wight ’99 is sharing his passion for environmental sustainability with students in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the nation. His students learn about economics and the environment and how they relate to the building trades such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry, heating, ventilation, pre-engineering and more. For his efforts, Wight earned the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators.

at BDCA, which will be a showcase of cutting-edge renewable energy systems.

He was also recognized with The City Gardens Club of New York’s Melville Award for environmental education and was selected as Alliance for Climate Education’s New York City Teacher of the Year.

At Linfield, Wight was involved in recycling efforts across campus and was inspired by an environmental problem-solving class, which allowed him to experience the ecological community, talk to urban planners and identify solutions to environmental problems, all while gaining experience outside of the classroom.

An applied physics major, he said Professor Joel Murray made physics fun and exciting by communicating difficult concepts in an engaging way.

“She provided me with a strong foundation in physics allowing me to critically evaluate the science behind sustainable technologies,” Wight said. “Professor Murray’s teaching style definitely influenced me as a teacher and has helped me break down difficult concepts to students, while also giving me the skills needed to help students evaluate the physics behind sustainable technologies.”

After graduating, Wight served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic, where he focused on sustainable community development through identifying solutions to soil erosion. He later received his master’s in education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and a subsequent master’s in environmental engineering through Columbia University’s Fu Foundation School of Engineering.

– Mardi Mileham, Alyssa Townsend ’15

For more information
To see videos of Michael Lindblad and Tim Love go to: youtube.com/linfieldcollege/videos
Learn more about Nathaniel Wight’s work at: www.mrwight.wordpress.com