

Spotlight on Teaching: Richard Goodwin

By Autumn Rhea Carpenter
Special to Texas Teacher

For more than 28 years, Richard Goodwin has taught his students the importance of understanding the immense impact that political, cultural and environmental issues around the world have on our daily lives at home.

Now with globalization and the technological revolution in communications seemingly shrinking the planet and breaking down borders, the crux of his work as a geography teacher still remains the same, although he uses a few new tools for teaching his students.



For instance, technology plays an increasingly important role in Goodwin's instruction at Dallas ISD's Yvonne A. Ewell Townview Magnet Center, which houses a variety of disciplines and some 2,200 students under one roof. Goodwin's ninth-grade, pre-advanced placement, world geography students have access to wireless Internet, a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, digital data projectors, and Smart Board technology.

"We were the first high school to pilot Google Earth in the classroom," Goodwin says. Google Earth is the software used by CNN in the reporting of international events. "I have been able to teach my students about different countries and then type a specific location into Google Earth to show the students actual structures and vehicles on the ground at that place. All of the technology works

together to reinforce geographic principles."

Those tools weren't always available in his classes throughout the years, but he says not always



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Goodwin teaches world geography to pre-advanced placement students in Dallas ISD.

having the best equipment sometimes is a motivator for learning to be creative and using what you have at hand. "My first job was teaching geography at an inner city Dallas high school, where I worked

for five years," he says. "It was tough and I taught each day holding my car keys in my hand, ready to leave at a moment's notice. I eventually gauged each student's learning potential and moved them along as far as possible in a school year."

Townview Center enjoys benefits that many schools do not possess, Goodwin says. "We have smaller class sizes, better resources, and accelerated instruction. But the fundamental difference is that these students want to be here and their parents care about their kids' futures. It is a model that Texas could benefit from following."

Goodwin has spent the past seven years of his career at Townview Center. With a major in political science and specialization in international relations from the University of Texas, he earned a teaching certificate

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Goodwin testifies before a legislative committee in Austin.

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from East Texas State University after graduation.

He taught for 14 years at other local schools and spent seven years as a social studies curriculum specialist. “That position allowed me to spend time learning and reflecting, but I felt like I was missing out on the action,” he says. “I returned to teaching because that is where I can make the greatest impact.”

In the summer of 2005, Goodwin was among 15 teachers chosen to spend 28 days on a trip to Egypt, sponsored by the University of Texas Department of Middle Eastern Studies and the U.S. Fulbright Commission. He was charged with developing an interactive Egypt curriculum project, geared toward secondary world geography and history students.

“We visited an elementary school that had been operating for 700 years,” he says. “Our group toured Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, Karnak, Aswan, the Sinai Peninsula, and Sharm El Sheikh, and everywhere we traveled, the people

were warm and engaging. Egypt is an example of a secular government existing in a region that is predominantly Islamic, so I had a wonderful opportunity to bring some important first-hand knowledge home to my students.”

Goodwin who joined TFT’s local affiliate for Dallas, Alliance/AFT, in 1979—says several Texas Federation of Teachers (TFT) members took part in the adventure to Egypt, and while there they discussed how the union has affected their careers. “Alliance/AFT is the largest local union in Texas, with 9,000 members, and during my career, the organization has become Dallas’ largest and most influential public school interest group. Dallas has a teacher salary schedule much higher than in most Texas districts, thanks to the efforts of Alliance/AFT’s members and expert leadership. They also have done an amazing job of ensuring that local school board candidates are both pro-student and pro-teacher.”

Goodwin has been active in the local union on many levels, and has worked with TFT on the state level, testifying in Austin on education issues. While proud of the union’s efforts locally and at the state and national levels to enact change, Goodwin says educators face a constant battle to improve public education in the face of short-sighted lawmakers. “I am saddened that in both Austin and Washington, the political administrations are using a

Band Aid approach for education,” he says. “The school funding bill passed this year by the Texas legislature is guaranteed to self-destruct in one year. I am not convinced that public schools in challenging areas can be improved by denying them adequate money.”

As a veteran teacher, Goodwin is often asked to share wisdom with new peers. “Buy good shoes,” he says. “And realize the difference between good and bad stress. According to the New York Times, teaching at an inner



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High-tech tools play a key role in instruction, but so might Goodwin’s pith helmet.

city school is one of the top five most stressful jobs in America. And if you don’t agree with a policy, vote, lobby, and let your voice be heard.

“Whining never solved anything. And always seek out the ‘Ah-ha’ moments of revelation and achievement, both for you and your students. Those are the instances that make it all worthwhile.”

November QuEST Conference Slated for Corpus Christi

The TFT Quality Educational Standards in Teaching (QuEST) conference will take place November 11-12 in Corpus Christi.

Dr. Sharon Nichols, the keynote speaker, will discuss testing research, and TFT will honor National Board Certified teachers at the conference. The conference includes more than 15 different workshops aimed at

improving educators’ effectiveness in teaching. Professional development credits may be available for participants, depending on their position and their local school district policies.

Registration deadline is October 16. For more information, click on the “Calendar” section of the TFT Web site at www.tft.org.