

Teacher of the Year's goal is to guide

Margaret Houk
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"Instead of being the sage on the stage, the teacher must be a guide on the side," Bill Collar, Wisconsin's 1988-'89 Teacher of the Year, says. He sees himself as a facilitator, helping students discover learning concepts themselves.

A history teacher and football coach at Seymour Community High School, Collar received the award from the State Department of Public Instruction in September, making him eligible for the 1989 National Teacher of the Year. The latter, underwritten and sponsored by Encyclopedia Britannica and Good Housekeeping magazine, will be awarded in April.

Collar's warm eyes, direct gaze, tall bearing and articulate speech suit him well for the honor. He credits his award to an excellence-in-education-minded community and a supportive School Board, staff and family. The administration and board have given him wide latitude to use innovative instructional methods, he said.

"Experience has shown that active involvement in learning is the most beneficial for future application of knowledge." He stretches imaginations and brings out creative skills through student-centered activities that relate to differing learning styles in the classroom.

A variety of teaching methods will enable all students to shine at one time or another," he said. "Students respond best when success is within their grasp. Educational materials must be presented at a rate that will challenge but not overwhelm the student."

Collar and his students have produced a documentary video of Seymour's history and a newspaper that focused on the history of the Old West from 1865 to 1900. In celebration of the US Constitution's bicentennial, Collar organized and directed a Constitution Knowledge Contest in the form of a Super Bowl game for all levels of students in the Seymour school district.

Collar teaches US history in reverse chronological order. "By studying about life in the next 30 years, students are highly motivated, since they are studying about themselves," he said. "By then going back to the causes, students readily see the connection between past and present.

"One of the greatest learning disabilities is the failure of students to make (those kinds of) connections". Greater learning results when students arrive at a concept themselves rather than having a teacher tell them about it. "A student may have potential to transcend the teacher in understanding concepts," Collar said. "I must not inhibit, restrict or limit the student's creativity."

The weakness in his teaching method is that there is less control over what is being taught. The risk is justifiable because "there is a difference between what is being taught and what is being learned," he said. Collar not only involves students in the learning process, but also holds them responsible for learning and has them share what they learn. He calls this "cooperative learning."

Collar says, "respect between teacher and student is important. Teachers are not in a popularity contest. They have to stand for positive values and be role models. Teachers must be enthusiastic if they are to excite students."

Seymour Community Schools Superintendent William G. Loaschins attributes Collar's achievement to "exceptional teaching ability." But Collar said, "This is a tribute to the school district." Citing the help he has received from other staff members, he said, "It takes cooperation from everybody." Collar was the 1985 State Football Coach of the Year and the 1977 Daughters of the American Revolution Social Studies Teacher of the Year.

He has spoken at numerous educational and athletic functions and conferences on sales and motivation. Active in his community, he helped develop Seymour's Historical Society and museum. For the past five years, Collar has held a four-session, two-hour Personal Motivation and Leadership Class for people of high school age at a Seymour bank. He has served on Seymour's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Board and has been involved in youth and other programs at his church. Collar has been an educator for 22 years. His wife, Holly, a homemaker and former teacher, is very supportive despite his long jaunts away from home. Collar has three daughters, one in college and two in high school.

He once tried selling insurance, but teaching always has been his first love, he says. Two teachers instilled that love — Bob Newhouse, his social studies teacher and football and track coach at Hortonville High School, and George Gilkey, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin — La Crosse.

Collar says most teachers want to move to a more lucrative field, but teaching has many intangible rewards. He especially enjoys the vigor and enthusiasm of youth. "It's the positive feedback from students that keeps a teacher going."