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Editorial

What Do You Need?

What do you need to improve your teaching? We all have "wish lists" of conditions and materials that would make our lives easier and enhance our ability to inform and motivate our students. A bigger budget, more time for preparation, smaller classes, bigger and better laboratory facilities, more support from parents and administrators, less paperwork, perhaps even the early retirement of some of those we work with . . .

It's nice to dream, but dreaming doesn't get our classes taught. Instead, we should think for a moment about how much we can do with what we already have. Excellent biology teaching can be accomplished with a minimum of resources. It requires effort and ingenuity, but we could do more with less:

- Useful laboratory equipment can be created from free or inexpensive resources. For example, one-gallon jars from the cafeteria can be transformed into aquaria and terraria filled with organisms from the local environment.
- Laboratory exercises can be devised that fit into 40 minutes and can be performed in ordinary classrooms, or even out in the hall. Students will not mind standing or sitting on the floor so long as they are *doing* something. And the biggest lab of all is just outside the door.
- Living organisms are all around

us and most are free or inexpensive. Do your collecting along the roadside or in the supermarket. Use house plants, pets, weeds and the zoo. Living organisms inspire students more than dead ones.

- Get out from behind the desk. Larger classes become more manageable when you move among the students and prevent them from daydreaming. And, encourage students to help one another—they will learn by teaching.
- Support your students and they will support you. If we teach well and have student support, we won't need the support of others.

We could use our schools' shortcomings as an excuse for not teaching biology well, or we could be inspired by the words of George Bernard Shaw:

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

Biology teaching in 1989 is clearly a mighty purpose.

Dan Wivagg
Associate Editor

Letter To The Editor

Dear Editor:

Because I demand my children and my students tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, I was shocked by your suggestion that I lie to develop skepticism (*Lies, Skepticism and Science*, February 1988, p. 74). Upon a closer examination of your editorial I was relieved to find your first "lie" wasn't a lie at all but that you were priming your students for the oversimplifications of biology. Lack of information, your second "lie," can hardly be counted as a deliberate falsification or an act of purposeful deceit.

The defects in my background ("lie" number three) I try to turn into my

students' strengths. Admittedly, some of my defects slip through, but I never want to prevaricate about the very truths our students should ponder. Too often young people wonder who is speaking the truth, so I think we need to instill skepticism without violating trust.

Perhaps I am too straightforward. Rather than encouraging them to look for my "lies," I have them correct my oversimplifications, I force them to report on current findings which may disagree with their outdated text, and I present the "other side of the coin."

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