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# AITE teacher praised for storytelling approach to math lessons

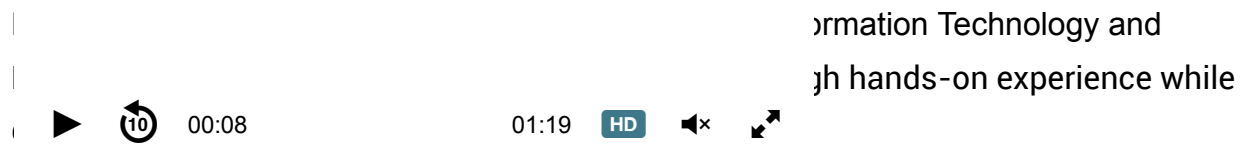
By **Nelson Oliveira** Updated 6:01 pm, Tuesday, May 2, 2017

**Stamford Teacher of the year Vin Urbanowski**

by Hearst Connecticut

STAMFORD — When high school students sign up for an aerospace engineering course, they typically expect a math-heavy curriculum.

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gh hands-on experience while



“Everybody knows the Wright brothers, right?” he asked students in a class Tuesday morning, referring to the siblings credited with building and flying the world’s first successful airplane.

Urbanowski was about to teach students how to build model airplanes with wooden craft. The teacher wanted to make sure students knew the purpose of the exercise as well as the history of what they were about to build.

“Where did the aviation industry get started?” he asked. “Hint: we call the body of an airplane the fuselage. We call the plane tail the empennage.”

“France,” several students shouted.

Urbanowski’s storytelling style is one of the reasons the Stamford school district has named him Teacher of the Year. Urbanowski, the first AITE teacher to win the award, was chosen among 41 city educators who were nominated in January by their peers.

All Teacher of the Year nominees and the winners of this year’s Spotlight on Teachers Award will be honored Thursday during a ceremony at University of Connecticut’s

**IMAGE 1 OF 10**[Buy Photo](#)

AITE math teacher Vin Urbanowski, the Stamford Teacher of the Year, leads a discussion during his Intro to Aerospace Engineering class inside AITE in Stamford, Conn. on Tuesday, May 2, 2017.

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Stamford campus.

"Vin is passionate about what he does, but he also shows you in a fun and engaging way the real-world applications of math," AITE Principal Tina Rivera said.

Students in Urbanowski's classes learn to design drones, launch rockets from the fields, fly a glider, among other skills.

"He engages us. He gives us experiences we wouldn't usually get from other teachers," junior Aaron Wood said.

Urbanowski always aspired to be a teacher even though his career didn't start in education.

He became a teacher in 2006 after working in several corporate positions, from

electrical engineering to TV commercial writing.

He realized the importance of storytelling when he worked in advertising. When he joined that industry at a small marketing company in Stamford, he was tasked with creating human narratives around a product.

"Instead of listing the product benefits, we would tell a story about how that's going to fit in your company or who are the people who invented it," Urbanowski said.

He then learned "storytelling is the key" to persuade customers and, later in his life, teach students.

Urbanowski's jump into the engineering field began while he was working as a pipe organ technician. His employer offered him a higher position if he learned how to repair electronic organs. He eventually earned an associate's degree in engineering from Norwalk Community College and a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Fairfield University.

A self-described "terrible math student" in high school, Urbanowski said it wasn't until he was in college when he got the motivation to learn the discipline.

He later earned a master's degree in education from the University of Bridgeport and soon launched his teaching career. His college professors showed him that math and engineering are not just about numbers, shapes and calculations.

"These are humanities, from point of view, and that's what I try to share in my classes," Urbanowski said.

"One of the things that makes us people is we are sharing stories," he said. "It's about inventing and telling stories."

Wood, 16, said he admires the teacher's passion for learning.

"He treats us as equals," Wood said. "He'll give us a certain task, but then he'll be like, 'OK, I also don't know how to do this. We're going to figure this out together.'"

Austin Cappetta, a senior, said the approach is extremely effective.

"The best thing is, he can actually teach us really, really well," the 18-year-old said. "I've learned so much in his class that I never would've known had I not taken it."

Urbanowski also draws praise from his colleagues. Teacher Anna Koltypin, who nominated him for the award, described her co-worker as "a renaissance man."

"As a colleague, he's such a pleasant person, such a gentleman," she said.

As a teacher, Koltypin said, he "makes math relevant."

Rivera agreed.

"Where else do kids get the experience to launch rockets from the field, fly in a glider?" she said. "I wish I had a math teacher like Vin when I was growing up."

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