

Teacher & Principal QUARTERLY

Striving for a better tomorrow in teaching

Pulling Double Duty

Educators in the Reserves

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to Write in a Text-Obsessed World?



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS | MOKENA, ILLINOIS



Dear Teaching Community,

In this time of testing and results-driven education, teachers rarely get the credit or appreciation they deserve. All of us at the Alliance would like to thank you for your hard work, dedication and continued belief that all children can achieve whatever they put their minds to.

Please explore our latest edition of the *Teacher and Principal Quarterly*. As always, we are committed to confronting the challenges facing educators today, and sharing invaluable resources as well as innovative, successful teaching strategies. It is with the help of teachers and principals like you that this is possible.

In this issue, we share the stories of two remarkable educators who find a balance between school, their families and fighting for the United States Armed Forces. Their stories remind us all of what it is to serve our community at every level. Other feature articles explore how teaching has changed in the digital age, the true value of homework, how to reach students of all levels and abilities, and much more.

At the K-12 Teachers Alliance, we sincerely promise to help you in any and every way we can. Our latest endeavor will hopefully make it easier for you to communicate those needs to us. We are developing an online community for teachers that shares the dedication to service and the human touch the Alliance has continually striven to achieve. The website will be another way for us to deliver the answers and solutions you are seeking.

Thank you again for taking a moment with us. May your exploration of this publication enrich your day—together we can strive for a better tomorrow in teaching.

Sincerely,
The K-12 Teachers Alliance

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How Much is Too Much?



Imported Patriotism

by Tom Hanson

A New Citizen Teaches His Students and the Rest of the Country What America Is All About

Born an Aussie and raised an Englishman, Scott Grimshaw is now an officer in the Maine Air National Guard and an English teacher at Leavitt Area High School in Turner, Maine.

When you hear the tales of those born as part of Generation X, you immediately think of the generation of young men and women who are self-absorbed and interested only in what life has to offer them. Then you meet someone like high school teacher Scott Grimshaw and quickly realize you can throw that stereotype onto the scrap heap of modern fallacies.

Military Background

Born in Australia, Grimshaw moved to England in 1973 when he was two-years-old. Growing up across the pond in Nelson, a part of Lancashire County, Grimshaw studied engineering and graduate from the Bolton Institute of Higher Education in 1992 with a degree in electrical engineering.

During his college years, Grimshaw came to America during the summer to work at a boys camp in the lakes region of central Maine. There he met his wife-to-be, Pamela. She proved to be the reason that Grimshaw would become an American citizen.

Grimshaw married Pamela after graduating in 1992 and moved to America. Pamela worked

and saved money for the couple as Grimshaw waited for his immigration status to clear for four months. He finally moved to this country permanently on February 4, 1993.

Since both of them were interested in travel and dedicated to service, the recent college graduates enlisted in the Air Force in 1993 before Grimshaw was officially a citizen. The couple was stationed at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland where Grimshaw went on to serve four years as a member of the United States military. After the completion of his service, he and his wife made the decision to return to Maine in 1997. Pamela and Scott built a house and settled into the next phase of their lives.

Grimshaw worked for an electrical testing company called AC Electric for more than three years. Though he found the work challenging and enjoyable, Grimshaw felt a need to do something more. He enrolled at the University of Maine Farmington, generally considered the top undergraduate teacher preparation program in Maine, and earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education in 2003, the same year he attained American citizenship. Despite his exemplary background in math and science, the former engineer chose English as his specialty.

At the same time he returned to school in 2001, Grimshaw reentered into service as the Air National Guard. Due to his citizenship status, he began serving as a draftsman but he still could not pursue an officer position.

A Sense of Commitment

Currently a First Lieutenant with the job responsibilities of a communications engineer, Grimshaw is in his 6th year of a ten year commitment. The traditional obligation for the guard is one weekend a month and two weeks a year. But Grimshaw was quick to point out that the schedule is much more fluid once you become an officer. In 2004, he spent six weeks in the storm-ravaged gulf after Hurricane Katrina. This year, he was called away from school for another six-week stint in the gulf.

Grimshaw knows he may face deployment, though his unit has not yet been called up.

"There will come a request for an engineering project at some point though maybe not in Iraq," Grimshaw explained. "I am okay with it because of my prior active duty

"We have a social responsibility across the world—not just to our country. The world is becoming one community."



service in the Air Force."

However, he failed to mention the negative impact that being deployed could have on his wife. As one would expect, the Lieutenant stated, "my wife is not as comfortable with that."

Pamela, in fact, already understands the demands of service and what it is like not to have regular contact with her husband. It was often difficult to communicate while Grimshaw was working in the heart of the Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Grimshaw also acknowledges that his military service also affects his time at school.

"The military is hard work and it does bite into my time when it comes to the classroom."

At the same time, Grimshaw feels a sense of responsibility to contribute to society and be of service to his adopted country.

"You have no right to complain," he says when addressing the issues that confront our country today. "You have no right to force an issue unless you are involved."

His sense of responsibility does not waver when it comes to the war in Iraq.

"It's a job that has to be done," Grimshaw said. "As a country we have a social responsibility across the world—a responsibility not just to our country. The world is becoming one community."

The Classroom Teacher

Grimshaw teaches ninth and tenth graders at Leavitt Area High School in Turner, Maine, a modest sized high school of 700 students set in a prime farming community. During his four years in education, Grimshaw has taught academic and basic English as well as a writing lab.

In his humble, unassuming way, Grimshaw shared his compelling story of becoming a teacher.

"One of the driving forces behind my becoming a teacher was my brother's suicide at 23," Grimshaw said. "I have had fourteen

years to accept this, but when I think back, I believe Ashley's struggles after leaving school were in part due to the educational opportunities he did not have. He was a smart young man that never really found his place in society. The competition for jobs was stiff in our working class community and although Ashley had skills, he would have been better served to at least have a two-year college degree. As a result of not feeling satisfied with his place in life, Ashley was tormented to his end. I try each day to help students achieve more, so they will not know the pain and frustration Ashley felt as a young adult."



As he enters his fifth year in the classroom, Grimshaw is finally getting a handle on the workload. Grimshaw has revamped his expectations in the short time he has been in education. He has put aside some of the traditional high-end reading materials that are often beyond the ability of his students in favor of a curriculum that ensures student involvement. In the meantime, he is anxiously following his student's test results to be sure that what he is doing is having the desired impact.

The changes seem to be working. Grimshaw loves the energy the students are now bringing to the classroom. He finds it personally rewarding when students can't wait to begin discussing the books they have been reading.



U.S. Air Force photo by Maj. Ted Theopolos

In the classroom, he stays away from talking about the military so as not influence students one way or the other. However, by virtue of his extensive travel, he will discuss

the discipline he has learned from his service as a critical aspect of being successful in the classroom. Yet when he speaks of discipline, he does not mean the traditional classroom

Guard. I have seen those who have to meet a military standard much like what is now expected in education.”

“You need to be disciplined to stay on top of your game as a teacher.”



the social and cultural aspects of life that he has been exposed to through his service.

When he began this year away from school because of his military commitment, Grimshaw sent the students letters informing them of what tasks he was involved in. Ever the teacher, Grimshaw embedded the 17 vocabulary words assigned to his freshman within the first letter he sent out. Students then had to locate those words within the letter they received from him.

Finding a Balance

Grimshaw was quick to point out the impact of the military on his teaching, pointing to

management aspect of the profession.

“You need to be disciplined to stay on top of your game as a teacher. The military has taught me how to keep up with the teacher workload.”

In fact, each of his jobs has improved his performance in the other. Teaching has helped him as much in the guard as the guard has helped him in the classroom.

“Teaching has helped me deal with the different types of people in the military,” he said. “By working with students, they have taught me how many different types of personalities there are out there. That has helped me with my career in the Air National

Supporting His Military Colleagues

If Grimshaw could share one lesson he’s learned from his dual service, he would want people to “understand there are many reasons for joining the military. We have some highly trained people who are committed to doing their job well. Our unit has a reputation for doing good work and our unit has a high rate of volunteerism. I am proud to be a member of such an outstanding group.”

As a teacher who came to the profession later in life, Grimshaw is everything a school district could want: bright, articulate, thoughtful, and totally dedicated to the profession. The Air National Guard officer also represents everything America could want in one of her soldiers.

Put the package together and you have a young man who is an exemplary role model for both students, his colleagues and all Americans. ●

The seventeen vocab words Grimshaw wrote to his students:

admonish
breach
brigand
circumspect
commandeer
cumbersome
deadlock
debris
diffuse
efface
opinionated
perennial
predispose
relinquish
salvage
spurious
unbridled

Can you find them?



Hi Guys;

There are 17 vocabulary words in this letter. See if you can spot them. I thought I would let you know what I am up to. I set off on August 12th from Portland Jetport to Biloxi, MS. to attend a training course on Keesler AFB. The journey itself was not without complications. Let me tell you about the trip, it was comical, and then let you know what I have been doing my first couple of weeks.

My first plane from Portland was delayed which had a ripple effect throughout the trip. As I waited in the Atlanta airport, I wished to admonish the Portland ticket counter attendant for not informing me that my connecting second flight had been canceled. I was tempted to breach security and step outside for a few moments, but I thought I might be treated like a brigand.

Eventually, the ticket attendant at Atlanta found me another plane to travel on. The only catch was that the plane departed from the other side of the airport. When I arrived at the gate, I found that it too had been delayed. I was now due to depart three hours later than my scheduled time. We finally boarded the plane at 7:15 PM only to make one trip around the airport and return to the terminal due to engine problems. However, it was only a short time before we were on another plane. This time we were successful in departing. We arrived in Biloxi at 11:00 PM.

In Atlanta a priest commandeered my phone to inform his ride not to wait, as we would be late. Afterwards he struck up a conversation with me. I had been warned to be circumspect when discussing military business with strangers even priests. Eventually, I collected my suitcase at the luggage claim area. It felt cumbersome to drag through the airport to the taxi stand. As we drove out of the airport, I was disappointed to see that traffic had come to a deadlock, and I would be delayed further.

We traveled through an area that I had seen before Hurricane Katrina left a wave of debris in its path. My return revealed that much of the debris had been removed, but concrete slabs were all that remained. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Authority) had provided the residents small trailers to live in. They diffused the local neighborhood. The devastation to the local community was still evident two years after the hurricane.

Finally, after registering at Keesler AFB lodging, I arrived at my room in a building complex that looked capable of lodging thousands of military members. It was 12:30 AM and 85 degrees outside. The fan in my room helped to diffuse the cool air pumped out by my air conditioner; I had to make a decision what to do next. I had to have a pressed uniform for my first duty day, which began in a few short hours at 6:30 AM. I decided to iron my uniform and then catch a few hours sleep.

As I set off at 6:00 AM for class, I was able to see that most signs of the hurricane had been effaced. However, two buildings were presently being demolished. Many of the downed trees had been replaced with new palm trees and perennials. These trees and plants seemed predisposed to the climate and were flourishing. I found the building I was assigned to and prepared to begin the day.

The instructor introduced himself and we shared our home stations and duty responsibilities. The instructor immediately began a debate about the military's role in Iraq and I found that the small call of seven students were very opinionated. Some students believed we had no purpose in Iraq while others believed we need to stay the course.

I relinquished my orders to the Captain who in-processed me. I was curious what had happened to the previous instructors who had been my teachers the last time I was in Mississippi. He told me that they were not able to salvage much of their possessions from the debris that scattered the base after the hurricane. Most of the instructors had been reassigned or promoted.

As I talked to some of the civilians, many of them believed that FEMA had been spurious in its promises to help following the disaster. However, it seemed more complicated than that, FEMA appeared to be attempting to make connections with those in most need. One man told me that FEMA offered to sell him the trailer that he was living in, but when he said he would buy it they told him that they had discovered the trailers contained carcinogens. Therefore FEMA was no longer permitted to sell them. FEMA was also struggling with some scavengers who had not been honest about their losses during the hurricane. These individuals had been unbridled in their desire to steal from the government.

The first week of class was spent using algebra and probability to determine the likelihood that certain events would take place during military conflict. I was tempted to call you up and ask for help. If you ever wondered why you had to learn math, let me tell you I found new uses that I never new existed, and I wished I had paid more attention when I was in school. The math was challenging and the week went by in a blur. By the time the weekend came, I was predisposed to sleep.

Let's see what the second week has in store.

Best regards,
Scott Grimshaw



But They

All

Read
At

Different



Levels
by Laura Robb

Not too long ago, on a visit to two sixth-grade classrooms, I saw very clearly the challenge teachers have before them when they try to differentiate reading.

In both classrooms, 11-year-olds who read like fourth graders shared tables with classmates who read like the average ninth grader—a five-year span. How you approach this challenge can make a huge difference for all levels of readers.

In the first classroom, where the students were learning about biographies, the teacher asked them to read the first two chapters of *The Greatest: Muhammad Ali* by Walter Dean Myers. But only half the class read the chapters. A few students just looked at the photographs, two students wrote notes to each other, one put her head on her desk, and several others began doodling. Roughly five minutes into the silent reading period, the teacher gathered the non-reading students and read the chapters aloud to them. When class ended, she sighed. “What else can I do? They can’t read the book, so I read it to them.” This is one way to manage whole-class reading. But there is another way.

In the second classroom—in the same school—the teacher read aloud a passage from *Wilma Unlimited* by Kathleen Krull. As she read, she modeled cause/effect strategy by thinking aloud and answering students’ questions about her thinking process. Next, she gave students instructions for silent

reading: They were to read the next two chapters of their book, jotting down tough words on self-stick notes. Each student was reading a biography at his or her own level. Some pairs read the same title, but most students had their own specially chosen books. As the group read, the teacher held individual conferences. When she met with Josh, she focused on making inferences. Keisha and Carla practiced using context clues. With David, she focused on causes and effects. Each conference lasted no more than a few minutes.

You’re probably thinking that you’d have a much better chance of reaching all your learners if your classroom looked more like the second one. But maybe you don’t know how to do it. Here are the 10 most frequently asked questions I get from teachers on differentiating reading instruction. I hope they’ll help you diversify, too!

Q: How do I get started with differentiation?

The first step is to move away from organizing your teaching around single books. Instead, choose a genre from which all books will be drawn, and pick a topic or theme. You can then focus on a particular issue that is present in all texts. Students studying realistic fiction, for instance, might discuss what constitutes a family, and what determines whether their relationship is smooth or rocky. If you have students read different books on the same topic, they’ll be able to bring a variety of ideas and perspectives to their discussions. Besides, using different texts means students will be able to advertise great books to one another!

Q: How do I find books at each student’s reading level?

I ask students to use the “three-finger method” to see if a book is just right for them. Have students open their book to a page near

the middle and read it. Using the fingers on one hand, students should count the number of words they can't say or don't understand. If students get past three fingers, the book is too hard. The book is "just right" if students understand and can say all but two or three words and if they can retell what they read.

Of course, as you get to know your students better, you will be able to predict what kind of books will be just right for each one.

Then you can gather books from your local library, school library, or reading resource room. Also, check out book club offerings or host a book fair at your school. Keep a small monthly allowance for searching local yard sales, and collect reading material from friends, family members, and neighbors, too.

Q: What does a unit plan look like? How much planning do I need to do in advance?

I suggest making an overall plan for each unit, including the theme, your choice of reading and vocabulary strategies for modeling and student practice, the selection of read-alouds, a variety of independent texts for students to choose from, journal entry assignments, and tiered projects that meet the varied reading and writing levels of students in your class, as well as their particular interests. You know your class best.

Q: Should I have individual conferences with students? What should I cover?

Meet with students individually while the group is doing silent reading. You might talk about a reading strategy you're working on or discuss specific aspects of text structure. For students who read far below grade level, you'll want to check their general comprehension before talking about these topics. Ask them to retell part of the text. You can also work with students on using context clues or discussing how your theme connects to the text they're reading. Students who can work independently can have partner conferences and then turn in a paper showing what they discussed.

Q: How do I keep conferences to only five minutes?

The key is to focus the conference on a single topic. For example, if you're holding a conference on a specific reading strategy, first have the student explain the strategy and tell how it helps her understand what she reads. Then, have the student open her

book and read one page aloud to you, doing a think-aloud to show how she applies the strategy to her independent text. Take notes on the student's performance, and provide scaffolding as needed. To make sure you don't lose track of time, us a kitchen timer.

Q: How do I assess students when they have different assignments?

Try using journal entries. If I want to grade students on their comprehension of realistic fiction, I might ask them to write journal entries that tell how they drew conclusions about a character's personality, what changed from the beginning to the end of the book, what the conflict was, and so on. Also try using tiered activities; that is, give students a menu of activities at different levels. Tiered activities can help you discover students' levels because students will usually choose activities they know they can complete successfully.

Q: Should I organize students into groups so they can discuss their reading?

Absolutely! I like to take some of the week's class time to meet with small groups for a 10- to 15-minute discussion. During these discussions, ask group members to talk about an open-ended genre question (for biography, Do you feel the person's accomplishments were positive or negative? Why?), or you can ask them to connect their book to an issue you've been discussing. Holding these conferences reinforces the social aspects of reading, and moves interaction beyond you and the student to the whole group.

Q: My students are reading so many different books. Do I need to read them all?

The answer is — fortunately — no! You can try to skim several books before a unit starts, but don't be discouraged if it's not possible to get to know them all. You'll be able to determine whether a student has read a book by the amount of detail he offers in his discussion. When you get a response such as, "The main character is a detective, and she's really smart. She solves the whole mystery," you should definitely probe further. Ask the student to give examples of why he thinks the character is smart and how she solves the mystery. If the student can't do this, he may not have read the book or he may have found it too difficult. Ask gently, "Why is it tough

for you to remember the details?" If the book was too hard, give the student a few other choices.

Q: Does every student need to read the same number of books?

No. Your stronger readers may choose longer texts, which means they will read fewer books. Meanwhile, struggling readers may read shorter texts but read more of them. Negotiate with your class the minimum number of books they should read in a unit. Prepare a schedule with reading and writing due dates, and remind students of the dates often. Help students budget their time by scaffolding the process. For example, break down a writing assignment into chunks (drafting, revising, publishing) and give a due date for each step. This way, you can offer students feedback between each step, further scaffolding their final outcomes.

Q: What do I do if students don't complete their reading assignments?

This situation must be handled with care in order to build trust and help students develop a passion for reading. One of my students, Zach, arrived at school announcing that he disliked reading and hadn't done any of the summer reading. "Are you going to call my mom?" he asked. I told him we would try to work it out together. We had several lunch meetings during which I found out more about Zach's reading struggles and about his personal interests. After we found books that suited his needs, Zach began to enjoy reading and did a lot of it. By the time he asked me if he still had summer reading to make up, I told him that he already had!

As teachers, our most basic goal is to reach each and every one of our students. By implementing differentiated instruction, you can meet your students where they are and provide the scaffolding and inspiration they need to move forward. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Differentiating Reading Instruction: How to Teach Reading to Meet the Needs of Each Student, reflects and offers ways to deal with the fact that middle school classes include students reading at a diverse range of instructional levels. To learn more about Robb's books, classroom libraries, recommendations, teaching and parent tips, and more, visit www.LRobb.com

Homework Wars

Is Homework Helpful or Harmful?

by Rachelle Nones

Kids don't want to do it.

Teachers don't want to grade it.

Experts don't even know if it has any true educational value.

So the question is:

Is homework really necessary?

No thorough answer to the homework question would be complete without the input of students.

After surveying 72 students in the south Los Angeles middle and high school, students expressed a desire to move beyond the “how many pages?” homework mentality. Many of the surveyed students preferred challenging homework assignments that “make us think” or “involve a part of our lives.”

While a handful of the students wrote that they loved to do homework, most reported negative feelings towards homework assignments that were “boring” or “too much.” A majority of the students felt that they had been inadequately prepared to successfully complete their homework assignments alone. They requested that teachers explain the homework in greater

detail and “actually give homework that we have talked about in class.”

Almost 30% of the surveyed students named English essays as “the worst homework assignment of the year.” They also commented on homework often being “too hard” and advised teachers to: “Take it easy because we already get frustrated with all the assignments we do in class.”

This student poll holds an obvious bias. Common sense tells us that most students would choose to do less or easier homework, if given the choice. These survey results do stress the struggle to challenge students without frustrating them, to adequately prepare students and to ensure that homework assignments are actually valuable.

Some experts believe that homework can actually impede student learning and motivation.

According to Dr. Vicki F. Panaccione, licensed child psychologist and founder of the Better Parenting Institute, “One of the biggest detriments that I come across each and every day in my clinical practice is the absolute abhorrence that the majority of students feel toward homework. I think, in most cases, the assignments are counter-productive and create a strong dislike for learning.” For optimum benefit, Panaccione recommends assignments: “that move them beyond the facts they have learned, helping students develop their ability to think, not regurgitate.”

Alfie Kohn, education critic and author of “The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing,” recommends that homework should be assigned only when necessary, and urges teachers to organize a change in mandatory homework policies. Kohn says that teachers should reflect on one main question before assigning homework: “What will the effect of this be on kids’ interest in reading, their desire to learn, and their attitudes about school?”

While Panaccione and Kohn might prefer that homework assignments be dramatically reduced, major research studies have proven that homework can increase student achievement at the secondary school level, in addition to other benefits.

According to Harris Cooper, “Homework can foster independent learning and responsible character traits.” Cooper is a professor of psychology and Duke University’s education director, and author of “Using Research to Answer Practical Questions About Homework.”

Parents also benefit from homework. Cooper argues that homework allows parents to get involved in their children’s education and to foster an appreciation for learning at home.

Clearly, the homework debate is not as simple as “to give homework or not to give homework.” The answer may be, rather, to redefine homework and its goals.

In her extensive research, Susan Hallam determined just that. Hallam is the head of the School of Lifelong Education and International Development at the Institute of Education, University of London. She says that the most important information that she has gleaned from research is that homework must possess specific aims related to learning.

“The real question that needs to be considered is whether homework is useful,” Hallam writes. “Giving homework just for the sake of it is wasteful of children’s time. Where it can be demonstrated to contribute to their learning, then it has value.” ●

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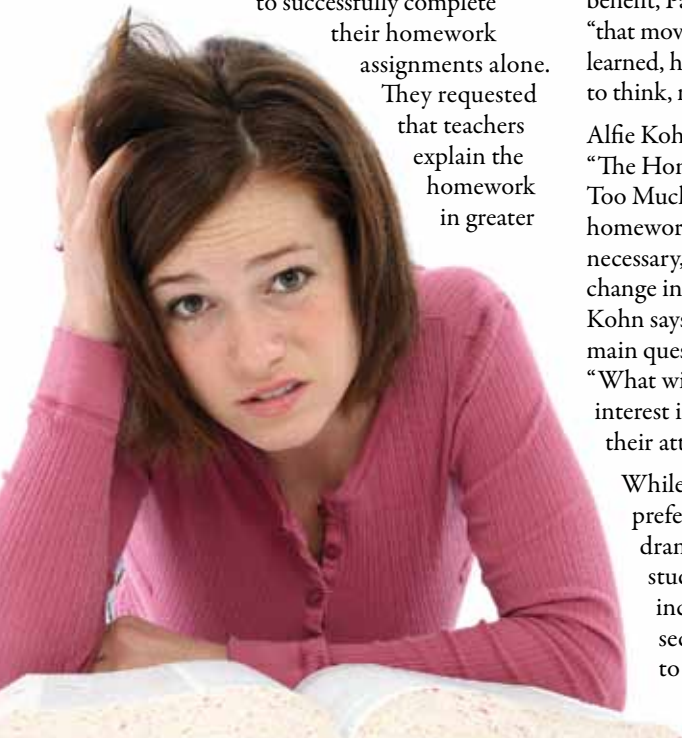
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iLearning: Using an iPod to Educate

These days, it seems a teacher can't turn around without seeing a student with those signature white headphones covertly hanging from his or her ears. Rather than fight the iPod epidemic, teachers can use it to their advantage.

In a 2007 article, the Pew Research Center reported that more than half of American teens own an iPod or MP3 player. The number is up from 1% in 2003 and expected to keep on rising (Pew Research Center/2006 Harrison Group). Since students are spending numerous hours a day listening to their iPods, they can become an invaluable tool for teachers who want to tap into students' interests.

Apple offers free educational tools, educator-created lesson plans, downloads, podcasts and more with iTunes U [Access at www.apple.com/au/education or by downloading iTunes and browsing the iTunes store], but there are endless possibilities beyond what Apple has to offer.

Here are a few more creative ways to integrate iPods into your classroom activities, homework assignments and general learning strategies.



Classroom Podcasts

Since some students retain more through sound than sight, podcasts can provide an alternate study aid to traditional book chapters. You can record entire lectures, classroom discussion, review games or short topic summaries. The most effective podcasts are typically 6-10 minutes long.

Audacity offers free podcasting software and an easy-to-understand tutorial for beginners: www.how-to-podcast-tutorial.com/15-audacity-download.htm



Audiobooks

Now is the time to expand a child's iPod world. Audiobooks can make reading a more recreational activity for busy students. They can listen while exercising, driving or sitting on the bus. Make "reading" a habit! Free Audiobooks are available for download at: librivox.org, freeclassicaudiobooks.com, gutenberg.org, and audiobooksforfree.com



Student Projects

Using the same techniques detailed in the podcast section, have students produce their own music, old-fashioned radio broadcast, theatrical readings of plays and stories, or news shows. They can record video or audio as an MP3, post it online, and share it with the class.

You can see examples of how more than 200 classrooms are integrating podcasting and digital media at the Education Podcast Network: epnweb.org

An extra bonus: parents will love being able to share their children's work with friends and family.



Language Learning

Whether you're working with ESL students or teaching a foreign language, bringing a language to life will make it infinitely easier for students. Students can listen to fluent speakers for extra practice outside class or record themselves to work on pronunciation.

If you already have tapes or CDs, students can upload them to iTunes and their media player.

Need more resources? Check out Open Culture's (www.oculture.com) foreign language page for free language and ESL podcasts.

Direct Connect to Iraq

One Principal Shares His Experience with Students From the War Zone

by Patty McKenna

The Class of 2008 first walked through Herscher High School's doors as freshmen at the same time Brian Riegler began his role as the school's new principal. Under normal circumstances, the class would have said goodbye to Mr. Riegler at their commencement ceremony. However, for this particular class, the parting came one year earlier.

In April, 2007, Brian Riegler's title changed from Principal Riegler to Lt. Riegler when he was called to active duty as a member of the Navy Reserves. During his tour, the principal/ naval officer communicated with students long distance from Iraq, where he was deployed to spend his 400 day assignment.

Ron Oloffson didn't hesitate to fill the role in Riegler's absence. Although he loves teaching

and coaching, Oloffson says that helping each other is what the school is about.

"The transition wasn't too difficult, but I credit that to all concerned—the office workers, teachers, staff and the superintendent," he said. "Everyone has stepped up to the plate. Everybody at this school makes this place work." Oloffson includes Riegler in that group, adding that the school's ability



to carry on without him is “the mark of a good administrator.”

Oloffson takes little credit for overseeing the high school, commending the staff, teachers, and administration for keeping the school running in the same high standards that have traditionally been the pride of the Herscher School District. But when talking to Mary Jo Bailey, office assistant to the principal, much of that credit does belong to the interim principal.

Everyone seems to agree on one thing, though, and that is that Riegler had the most difficult transition.

“He had to leave everything, including his home and family,” Oloffson said. Riegler is married with three young children.

Today’s technology certainly made the separation easier. While serving his country, Lt. Riegler communicated with the school and his family via telephone and email. Oloffson pointed out that, at the beginning, the principal called frequently, when vacancies were being filled and they were preparing for the new school year, including checking in on the first day of school to wish Oloffson good luck.

Riegler specifically requested that the staff and school not do anything special prior to his departure. They agreed not to hold an assembly, but as Oloffson said, “This was impressive. We had to do something.” The chorus came in and sang “The Star Spangled Banner,” and when the students exited the building at the end of the school year, they had an opportunity to say goodbye and wish him well.

According to Oloffson, it was a touching scene as Riegler stood outside his office and a long line of students formed, each waiting for their turn to personally extend their support and appreciation. “He was very moved.”

The students’ accounts are also touching, specifically for the graduating Class of 2008.

“We knew we wouldn’t see him again before we graduated,” said one student. Another said, “It was so sad. I gave him a hug before he left.” One girl said that it made her cry when Riegler asked her to promise to come back and visit after graduation, and then she firmly stated that it’s a promise she intends to keep.

Riegler’s tour of duty has affected the students in other ways, too. One senior admits that she pays more attention to the news now, especially when they air a segment

about Iraq. “I want to know what’s going on more than ever because I know someone who’s there.”

Lt. Riegler tried to share his military experiences with the students and staff. He personalized many of his emails with pictures which display the sharp contrast between life in the States and life in a war zone. Mary Jo Bailey, his office assistant, described photos she received of Humvees being blown up on the side of the road and the remains of a once grand palace turned to rubble. While those stories and photos are sensational, Riegler also told them about the strong positive impact that his experiences in Iraq have had on him.

Teacher Betsy Flett communicated regularly with Mr. Riegler about those experiences while he was serving in Iraq. As head of the Interact Club, a student organization affiliated with Rotary International, Flett suggested several service projects which would allow the students to make their own contribution. When Riegler notified them that a burn clinic an Air Force Staff Sergeant he trained with was in need of clothes, Interact went into the community, collected and shipped eight boxes of clothing for the children. Interact also held an after-school activity at one of the district’s grade schools that helped fifth graders compose letters to the soldiers overseas. Those letters, along with Christmas favors (candy canes crafted to look like reindeer) were mailed to Riegler, who distributed them during the holidays to American soldiers.

*“He had to leave everything,
including his home and family”*



Ms. Flett’s “Bakery and Business” class also joined the effort, baking cookies and vacuum packing them before shipping them overseas to the principal. Flett was proud to say that “He gave the class a thumbs up.” Pulling out an email, she read Riegler’s thank you, which included the comment, “I had a visiting general take a liking to the cookies.” All in all, the experience has been a positive one, as Flett reflected, “It’s good for the students to know that he is serving his country and protecting the freedoms that we often taken for granted.”

The students did get an impression of their

principal’s Navy life after he spent five weeks stationed off the coast of Iraq during the summer of 2006.

In an interview in *Tiger News Today*, Herscher’s school newspaper, Riegler described his duties. “I was stationed aboard the Aircraft carrier USS Enterprise in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Iraq. My duties included briefing and debriefing pilots for combat patrol missions over Iraq.”

In his military career, Riegler said he’d also visited Australia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Spain, France, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, and Greece. As one student journalist wrote, “Not many students can say their principal has lived everywhere from England all the way to Japan.”

Though the students are happy to learn from their principals vast experience at home and abroad, they anxiously awaited his return home.

Well, that wait is over. Brian Riegler has returned safely to rule the school in the 2008-2009 school year.

Riegler can’t give enough praise to Oloffson and the rest of the staff for the job they’ve done in his absence.

“By knowing the good hands our students were in during my absence allowed me to focus on my job at hand in Baghdad and not worry about HHS,” he said.

Since returning, he has been able to share more of his experiences with his staff and students. Riegler received the Bronze Star

for his work as a Cell Leader for the Prime Minister of Iraq’s Intelligence Support System. Since the mission was so sensitive, he was unable to reveal any information in fear of endangering his safety or those of the people with whom he was working.

“At every public event or sporting event since my return I receive well wishes and ‘welcome home’ comments, reminding me how special a place HHS is to work, and how much our community supports our service members even during a war that has grown increasingly unpopular,” Riegler said. ●

Shakespeare Doesn't Blog

SOMEWHERE OUT THERE is the mind that will produce the next great American novel. If, however, that would-be author is under the age of 18, the words they write may be more of "SOZ" and "TGGTG" than beautiful, flowing prose. • "We have a whole generation being raised without communication skills," says Jacquie Ream, former teacher and author of "K.I.S.S. Keep It Short and Simple" (Book Publishers Network). She contends text messaging and the internet are destroying the way our kids read, think, and write.

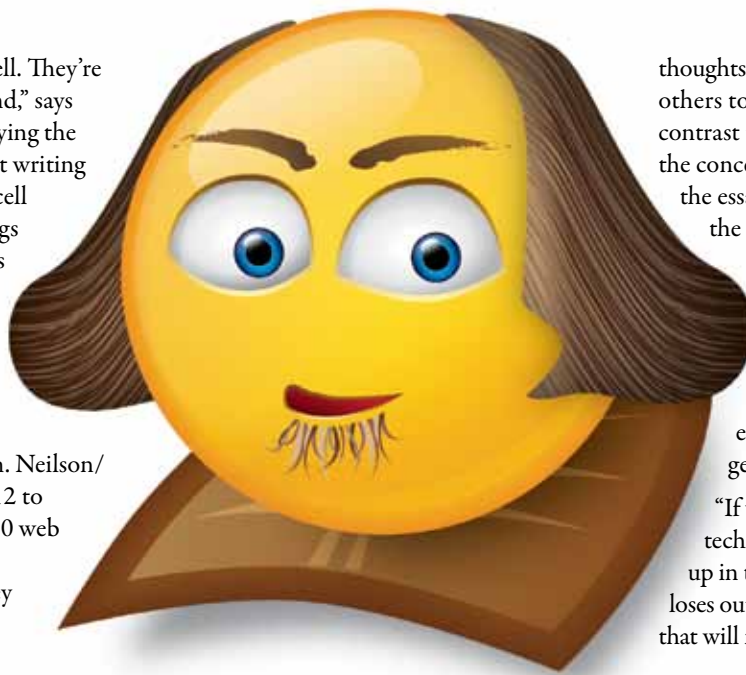
- A recent National Center for Education Statistics study reports only one out of four high school seniors is a proficient writer. A College Board survey of the nation's blue-chip companies found only two-thirds of their employees are capable writers.

"These kids aren't learning to spell. They're learning acronyms and short hand," says Ream, "Text messaging is destroying the written word. The students aren't writing letters, they're typing into their cell phones one line at a time. Feelings aren't communicated with words when you're texting; emotions are sideways smiley faces. Kids are typing shorthand jargon that isn't even a complete thought."

Reading may not be the problem. Neilson/NetRatings reports the average 12 to 17-year-old visits more than 1400 web pages a month. Ask that average teenager what they read, and they may be able to tell you. Ask the average teenager what their opinion is on that blog or article, and you may find them fumbling for thoughts that are their own.

"What's not taught today," says Ream, "is critical thinking skills. Teachers are forced to use what little classroom time they have to teach to the standardized tests. The kids learn how to regurgitate information to parrot it back for the correct answer, but they can't process the thought and build on it."

School system money is often tied into the standardized testing results. Many teachers complain of being pressured to spend so much time teaching to the test that they don't have the time to guide the children into true, thought-provoking learning.



"There's a whole generation that can't come up with new ideas," says Ream. And even if they did have a breakthrough thought or opinion of their own, they couldn't share it with the rest of us."

This generation, however, isn't a complete 'write off.' Ream says the parents can make a big difference in the way their children communicate. She suggests reading the same book your teenager is reading - then trying to open a dinner table conversation about the plot of that novel.

Ream says writing is a skill that can be learned. Her book, "K.I.S.S. Keep It Short and Simple" lays out a formula she says makes writing easier: Teach your kids to organize their

thoughts on paper; compare the subject with others to show how the ideas are similar; contrast the subject with others to show how the concept is different; and interrelate - write the essay to show how the subject relates to the reader.

Every generation has great minds with great thoughts that can guide the rest of us. If teenagers aren't taught to groom their opinions and ideas so that they can write effectively, society will lose out on a generation of creativity.

"If we let these kids get caught up in technology, if we let politicians get caught up in testing, it's America as a whole that loses out on great words, thoughts and novels that will never be written." ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jacquie Ream has been a teacher, a workshop director, a daycare owner, and is now the author of "K.I.S.S. Keep It Short and Simple." She has devoted her life to guiding others how to clearly and concisely share their thoughts and ideas on paper. She has a BA in English and a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Washington. www.reamink.com



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EXTREME SPORTS

How Much is Too Much?



For the 30 million student athletes in America, sports can be an excellent way for high school students to build relationships, stay in shape and learn valuable skills about teamwork. But high school sports aren't always fun and games. With scholarship hopes, parental pressures and an ultra-competitive atmosphere, some student athletes may begin to crumble under the pressure.

Pressure

How much should ride on throwing a ball in a basket, hitting a home run or running fast?

In many ways, high school sports have evolved into a high stakes game that puts student athletes under a tremendous amount of pressure. It may start in little league with over-eager dads and coaches lightheartedly inspiring kids' major league dreams, but it doesn't always end there. Student athletes don't want to let down their parents, their teammates, their school, or with high profile sports, their town.

These pressures are coming at a time when most high schoolers' confidence and self-image are in question. Children and teens

want to live up to the potential that their parents see in them. They also want to ease the burden of college tuition. Earning an athletic scholarship would fulfill both of those goals.

According to The Sports Scholarship Handbook, only 1 in 50 high school athletes receive athletic scholarships. Consider the pressure to be that one along with those from school work, other activities and social lives; that is a lot for a teenager to handle.

The drive to win, to be the very best, can inspire greatness in children and adults alike, but that winner-take-all mentality can also set unrealistic expectations. It is this kind of mindset that can sap the fun out of sports.

Rather than create these pressure-filled pastimes, shouldn't we use high school sports to foster well-rounded young adults?

Physical Dangers

In order to be successful in high school sports these days, students are required to commit to one sport and play on club teams all year.

When athletes play one sport day-in, day-out all year round, they put themselves in danger of damaging joints, tearing muscles, or causing stress fractures due to the constant repetitive movements. Despite these dangers, coaches continue to warn students that they risk their roster spot and any college hopes by playing multiple sports.

A recent study demonstrates the alarming increase in these repetitive stress injuries. The study tracked the number of Tommy John surgeries, procedures done on pitchers to repair damaged elbow ligaments and was completed by the American Sports Medicine Institute, Andrews Sports Medicine and Orthopedic Center, in Birmingham, Alabama.

“Before 1997, Tommy John surgery was performed on only 12 of 97 patients (12%)

played baseball, Lebron played football and A-Rod played basketball, football and soccer.”

He ends with advice to parents and coaches: “So allow your child to participate in multiple sports ... Participating in multiple sports also allows them to see if they are talented in another sport, less stress on the body, overall athleticism increases, gain more friends & social interaction, and there is less pressure to be perfect.”

try-outs come around, coaches are more likely to favor club players that they’ve seen play for years over unknowns who have only practiced on the playground.

John Cochran, a parent from Newton, Mass., argues that all students should have the chance to play high school sports regardless of skill level.

“Studies have shown that students who participate in high school athletics have



who were 18 years or younger,” coauthor and research director E. Lyle Cain, MD said.

“In 2005 alone, 62 of the 188 operations performed were on high-school athletes, a third of the surgical group,” Cain said. “The reality is that this surgery is successful and that’s good. But a disturbing trend of younger kids needing the surgery is troubling.”

Ironically, playing multiple sports can help athletes to be in better physical shape, develop multiple muscle groups, and keep them from burning out on their chosen sport.

Detavious Mason agrees in his article for The Guilford Orthopedic and Sports Medical Center titled “Age of Specialization: One Sport Vs. Multiple Sports.”

“Kobe Bryant, Roger Federer, Tom Brady, Lebron James, Alex Rodriguez,” Mason wrote. “When these names are brought up, a few things come to mind: excellence, transcendent talent, winning, but the thought of them specializing in one sport should not. Kobe & Federer were soccer players, Brady

In extreme examples, some sports can endanger an athlete’s general health. Whether students are trying make weight for wrestling, stay slim for dance or bulk up for football, sports can trigger some dangerous eating and exercise habits.

The Out-Crowd

High school sports can also create an “in crowd” mentality that excludes those don’t make the cut.

Let’s face it, not all kids are athletic superstars. Does that mean they don’t love the game and want to be a part of the team? Does that mean they should miss out on the social and physical benefits of organized sports? Though some kids stay involved as managers or fans, well-organized recreational options are few and far between.

These exclusions also extend beyond general skill level. With club sports being an unofficial requirement to make many high school teams, underprivileged students are put at a distinct disadvantage because they cannot afford membership fees and travel expenses that club teams require. When

higher grade point averages, fewer discipline problems and greater self-esteem,” Cochran wrote in his editorial for Newton’s *Wicked Local* newspaper.

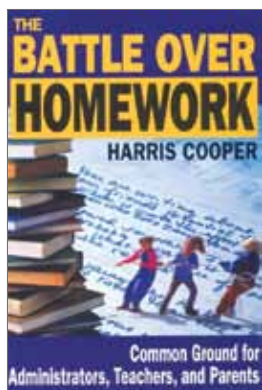
“By cutting everyone except the very best players, only a small fraction of students will ever benefit from those [government allocated] resources,” he wrote. “If the prevailing philosophy is taken to its logical conclusion, public high schools should provide inferior educational opportunities to students who are not at the very top of their class.”

The Solution

My goal is not to ban high school sports, but to return sports to their original purpose: fun. If we can change the general outlook on these sports – letting kids play multiple sports, refocusing on recreation instead of cutthroat competition, and creating a fair playing field for all would-be athletes – then high schoolers can really go out and play. ●



Teacher's Bookcase

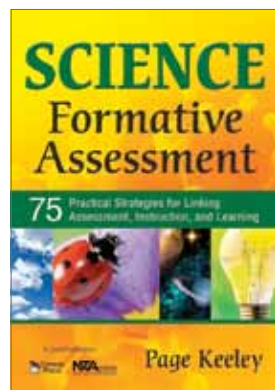


Homework is the cause of more friction between school and home than any other aspect of education and becomes the prime battlefield when schools, families, and communities view one another as adversaries. This comprehensive third edition tackles all the tough questions: What's the right amount of homework? What role should parents play in the homework process? What is the connection between homework and achievement?

Harris Cooper provides educators with terms, definitions, and updated research to hold constructive conversations with students, their families, and the community.

About the Author

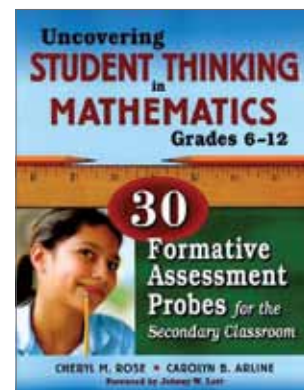
Harris M. Cooper is a professor in the Department of Psychology & Neuroscience at Duke University. He earned his doctorate degree in social psychology from the University of Connecticut. His research interests include research synthesis, applications of social and developmental psychology to educational policy issues, homework, school calendars, and after school programs.



These 75 specific techniques help K-12 science teachers determine students' understanding of key concepts and design learning opportunities that will deepen their mastery of content and standards. Each technique includes considerations for design and implementation, modifications for different types of students, and applications for other content area.

About the Author

Page Keeley, 2008-2009 president of the National Science Teachers Association, is the senior program director for science at the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance (MMSA). Her work at the MMSA involves leadership and professional development for teachers and leaders in Maine and nationally, as well as the development of materials and tools to support science teaching and learning.



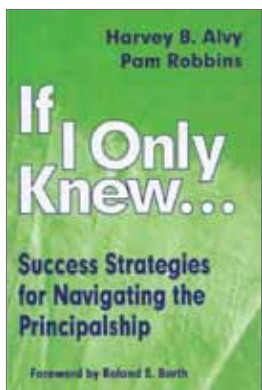
The authors offer a powerful diagnostic technique in the form of field-tested assessment probes-brief, easily administered activities to determine students' thinking on core mathematical concepts. Designed to question students' conceptual knowledge and reveal common understandings and misunderstandings, these easy-to-use probes generate targeted information for modifying mathematics instruction.

About the Authors

Cheryl M. Rose is the senior program director for mathematics at the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance (MMSA). Working with **Carolyn B. Arline**, she is currently the co-principal investigator of the mathematics section of the NSF-funded project Curriculum Topic Study and principal investigator and project director of a Title IIa State Mathematics and Science Partnership Project, MATHS (Mathematics: Access and Teaching in High School)

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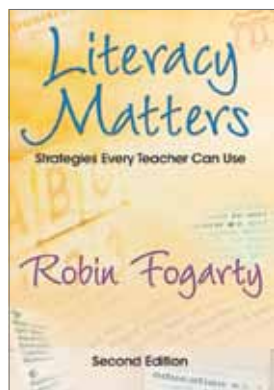


Here's the essential information you need to succeed - whether you're starting your first principalship or moving to a new post. You'll find out how to sharpen your crucial problem-solving skills. Make good decisions quickly, without second-guessing yourself. Develop a proactive approach and address small concerns before they become big problems. Alvy and Robbins offer you ideas, strategies, and words of wisdom gleaned from practical experience to help you prepare for anything a school leader might encounter.

About the Authors

Currently on the faculty of Eastern Washington University, **Harvey B. Alvy** specializes in educational leadership. He served as a practicing principal for 14 years and his experience in multicultural international schools is extensive.

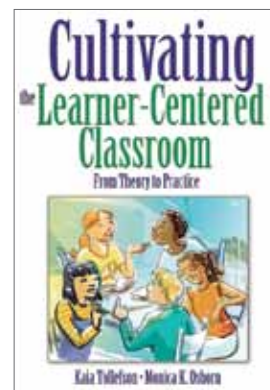
Pam Robbins' teaching career began in 1971 in special education. She later taught intermediate grades and coached high school basketball. As an administrator, she served as director of special projects and research for Napa County (CA) Office of Education and director of training for the North Bay California Leadership Academy.



Scores of children across the country do not read with comprehension. To remedy this, literacy needs to become a national priority. In *Literacy Matters*, internationally-recognized author, educational coach, and consultant Robin Fogarty defines and reviews 15 practical literacy approaches that teachers can use across all content areas and grade levels to help students develop essential literacy skills. This user-friendly resource provides strategies for immediate implementation with an overview of the research and best practices associated with each strategy.

About the Author

Robin Fogarty is president of Robin Fogarty and Associates, Ltd., a minority-owned educational publishing/consulting company. A leading proponent of the thoughtful classroom, Fogarty has trained educators throughout the world in curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies. She has taught at all levels, from kindergarten to college, served as an administrator, and consulted with state departments and ministries of education in the United States, Puerto Rico, Russia, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Great Britain, Singapore, Korea, and the Netherlands.



Teachers at every level face the challenge of finding a balance between learner-centered philosophies and day-to-day classroom life. Aligned with progressive educational thought, this book shows teachers how to make the jump from theory to practice and cultivate learning communities in the classroom and in their schools.

About the Authors

Kaia Tollefson's career in education began in Kodiak, Alaska, in 1983. She was a middle school teacher there for nine years and worked in administration for the next five, first as a curriculum and staff development coordinator and then as an elementary school principal.

Monica K. Osborn has been teaching at Puesta del Sol Elementary School in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, since 1994. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in education from the University of New Mexico in 1994 and 1995, respectively, and an education specialist degree in educational leadership in 2007.

Get Their Attention in 5 Easy Steps

by Dora Sasson

Tips for Teaching Reluctant Readers and ESL/ELL Students

There are few things more challenging than motivating a student who doesn't want to learn. But as all good teachers know, no such student really exists.

After working with remedial learners in the ESL program at my junior high school, I truly experienced the struggle to motivate those borderline students who seemed to be constantly exposed to failure. I also experienced the success that is possible if you put in the extra effort with those students. It was only after experimenting with different learning techniques and personalizing the curriculum to suit my students that I found the key to reaching these reluctant readers.

Many of these readers have poor reading strategies; others are discouraged by varying degrees of failure; some are too scared to even look at a text. Many of my students became passive when faced with a reading text. Initially, I tried to simplify their exercises, provided easier language input, gave them a choice in their graded assignments, but to no avail. None of these techniques helped me with motivating them to read even a simple text.

My first roadblock with these reluctant readers was my textbook. Many schoolbooks have far more texts than are needed or texts that may not be suitable in one way or another. Some teachers assign supplemental reading materials to make up shortcomings in the textbook, but those extra assignments

can further intimate readers. Because of these shortcomings, I look for ways to motivate my ninth grade students beyond the framework of the text.

It became clear to me that creativity and the choice of text would be the key to success with these students. I have experimented with multiple teaching strategies that have reading and language implications in an attempt to engage students in my ESL classroom.

Here are the 5 foolproof tips I discovered to motivate even the most reluctant student.

Tip 1: Teach Topics that are Motivating

Interest and topic are key. As Richard Day points out in "Selecting a Passage for the Reading Class," relating to student interests has serious implications for facilitating second-language acquisition. Most topics in my students standard reading books were culturally and socially removed from their world. Part of getting students interested in reading is to expand the students' knowledge on topics they enjoy. After surveying students, music prevailed as a topic that all the students were interested in. After presenting the students with a new, shorter text I had written on Oriental and Middle Eastern Music singers, they were more motivated to read.

The students also had sufficient background knowledge on at least one of the themes.

Now that you have wisely chosen a reading assignment, how will you explore the text? What is your reading plan?

Tip 2: Create Step-by-Step Lessons

Start small by using bits of text such as word clues, titles and subtitles. Important vocabulary used in a pre-reading activity can serve as a lead-in to the topic. Keep the number of unknown vocabulary items for each text to a minimum, allowing you and the students to focus on the goals of the reading course. Those goals are digesting the text and understanding its deeper meanings. Make sure there are enough warm up and pre-reading activities. Encourage predictions whenever possible. Keep reading passages short and visually appealing.

Richard Day points out that appearance of the reading passage (layout, print and type size) affects readability. Keep the lines short. This will enhance reading speed. Having a short text increases the students' focus and the text's readability. Paragraphs in each text should be clearly defined. Make sure the font is clear and attractive. Length is likely a major factor in the frustration in reluctant readers.

Tip 3:

Choose Your Text Carefully

Look at the texts from the perspective of your students. Do your reading objectives match the objectives of the unit? Not all texts are exploitable due to their thematic, lexical, syntactic and structural appropriateness.

Here are some questions to consider:

1. **Lexical exploitability:**
Do the texts offer an opportunity to acquire some new vocabulary?
2. **Structural exploitability:**
Can students explore text meanings through the structure and text conventions?
3. **Thematic exploitability:**
Does the text have potential to aid in the understanding of moral issues through discussion?
4. **Syntactic constructions:**
Have you seen that structure before? Syntactic constructions in a passage affect its readability. If the texts have structures that have not yet been covered in class, it might be wise to pre-teach the structure or choose a text with fewer new grammatical structures.

If a text is exploited well, it will match up with the objectives of the unit and allow the teacher to accomplish the objectives of the reading lesson.

Tip 4:

Identify and Hone Phonic and Phonemic Skills

In many of my classes, reluctant learners are also remedial learners who have experienced very little success in the reading classroom.

To develop a successful reading program design, you can follow steps to identify and hone phonic and phonemic skills:



1. Take 'inventory' and give mini-diagnostic tests at the beginning of the school year.
2. Design questions based on letter and word levels that give you a clear indication of the student's decoding abilities.
3. Target and preteach those sound blends, vowel sounds, and letter sounds that appear throughout my chosen text. Phonemic awareness activities constitute a big part of the lessons for those lower level students who have yet to master basic reading skills.
4. Word and letter recognition is the foundation for future comprehension. (Purcell-Gates). Once students can decode the words, introduce those words to the students, and then only in short passages. This builds up their confidence and gives them a reason to continue reading.
5. Finally, present the students with a story that includes as many words from the targeted cluster as possible in a logical context and have them answer questions about the text.

Hopefully, they will be able to decode the appropriate phones and extract the correct meaning in its embedded context. By the end of the unit, the students will have achieved phonemic awareness of this specific phoneme.

Tip 5:

Emphasize Authentic and Meaningful Language Communication

Students remember the targeted words and chunks of language when they are taught in a meaningful way. More often than not, this involves doing something with the language beyond simply digesting it.

Theoretical Underpinnings:

1. Reading strategies cannot be taught in isolation.
2. Reading is comprehension.
3. Comprehension involves the construction of individual meanings.
4. Learners need to acquire a certain threshold in order to deeper process language.
5. Meaningful communication is the goal.
6. Learners need language input from all four modes: listening, speaking, reading and writing recycled and in a variety of methods.

"This teaching first involves students in purposeful (to the student) reading and writing, then pulls out some skills—ranging from decoding to text structure and comprehension—for focused work." (Purcell-Gates)

Final Note:

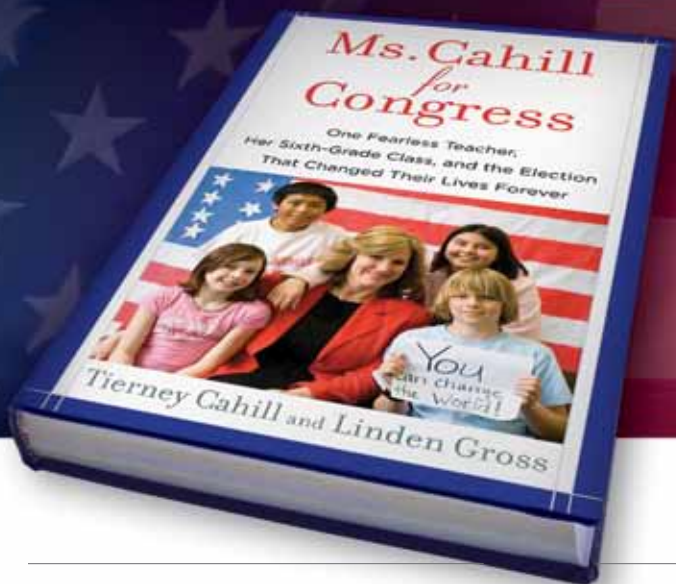
Your number one goal should always be creating a meaningful learning experience for students. If you focus on meaningful communication rather than technical, simple reading that only leads to a 'shallow,' minimal understanding, you will create that learning experience. Hopefully, you will find that this program is designed to provide students with tools for learning independence and making them less reliant on teachers.

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An Interview with Tierney Cahill

Teacher, Congressional Candidate, author of *Ms. Cahill for Congress* and inspiration for the 2009 film "Class Act" starring Halle Berry



"YOU CAN'T RUN FOR OFFICE in this country unless you're a millionaire or you know a lot of millionaires." After her sixth grade student made this comment, Tierney Cahill assured her class that anyone can run for office. When they dared her to prove it, she did just that.

• With her students managing the campaign, this single mother working three jobs got her name on the ballot, won the Democratic primary with little money and no connections, and inspired her students beyond her wildest expectations. • The book is a real inspiration to those teachers who put the extra effort into making difference in their students' lives. I had the pleasure of interviewing Tierney Cahill about her campaign experience, her teaching philosophy and her newfound understanding of the American political system.

What was the biggest challenge during your campaign?

Economically, it was always so hard. I worked so hard and it was frustrating. I would think "why is life so unfair?" I did everything you're supposed to do. I went to college, chose a respectable profession, worked two and three jobs and "we just weren't making it."

People say that poverty builds character, but it's just demoralizing; it's so easy to fall into a depression. "It makes me angry that our teachers have to live like that." It's a sign of disrespect that you'd make teachers have to get second and third jobs to support themselves and their families. You'd never expect that of doctors or lawyers. Teachers need to be paid appropriately. If that means higher standards, I'm all for it.

Is this the America we teach about in school?

Not at all. There were definitely things I didn't share with my kids because I didn't want to discourage them.

What was the most discouraging?

"The way the parties anoint people to support and fund and help and alienate others was significantly disturbing to me."

Everyday people should get into it, but I can see why they won't. If there are people willing to put themselves out there, then they should get the chance. "If you don't, you're not going to have really quality people running."

"It's a repulsive process at times. Ordinary people can't plug their noses to it for that long. As teachers, we start every day asking ourselves if what we're doing is best for the kids. That's what people in office should be asking: Is what I'm doing best for my country?"

How successful was the campaign as a teaching tool?

"It showed that children can learn so deeply and richly when you give them that much freedom."

I saw huge progress in emotional maturity and self-esteem in my students. Three of my students went from LD to de-certified that year, which was a major victory for me to get them out of special ed to fly on their own. They did amazingly well.

This kind of project made them feel "valued, relevant, it was really important them, they felt important and they blossomed. Outside the box teaching can truly uplift. There's no

way they could get that experience from just reading the book and answering questions."

With so much pressure on curriculum and standards, I feel like we may be "moving backward," and "cramming factoids down their throats." That not authentic learning and it's "not lighting them up."

What was the one major lesson you took from your experience?

Never allow others to tell you you're not good enough to do something. Just live whatever you think your destiny is. There are a lot of negative messages being sent out, but if something is within you, you need to do it.

How will you top this?

I was just trying to do the best I could for my students. Good teachers want to be prepared, want to give them their bests... There are millions out there, so it's awkward to get this attention. "I'm just honored that I'm part of that tribe." I'm certainly not any better, but I'm happy if this attention can bring light to the profession. ●

A Note From The K-12 Teachers Alliance...

Want to contribute to Teacher and Principal Quarterly?

Contact Annie Condon at
acondon@k12teachersalliance.com

The K-12 Teachers Alliance wants to know how we can help you.
If you wish to speak with a K-12 advisor, please visit us at
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