



Teacher Tip of the Week

Teaching Secrets: Students Can Do Hard Things

I recently observed a teacher passing out an assignment to a class of high school English students. "This is hard," complained one. "No, it's really not hard, it's easy!" replied the teacher.

Even though I could recall saying the same thing myself on occasion, something about this exchange bothered me. What can our students possibly learn if we only gave them easy tasks? On the other hand, how can we motivate our students to accept a challenge if they doubt their own ability?

I asked Lynn Scott, an experienced teaching colleague, what she thought. Her reply: "If my second graders say something is hard, I say 'That's ok. You can do hard things!'"

To make her case, Lynn talked to her students about hard things they had mastered. They all were born not knowing how to walk. Did they just stand up one day and run around? No, they taught themselves, by grabbing onto furniture and other people, and they gradually learned to walk without falling. They learned to ride bicycles the same way -- by hard practice and by sometimes falling down.

Research shows that students who lack motivation are often not convinced that the effort they invest in themselves is

going to be rewarded. They simply have not been academically successful in the past, so why bother? Furthermore, their parents may have been ineffectual in school, creating a template for failure easier to live up to than disprove.



So how do we teach our students they are capable of doing so much more than they even realize? This is the true art of teaching. Here are some ideas:

• *Keep a portfolio of work, beginning with samples from the first week of school (or any fixed point in time). Then, in November or December, you can take a look at their earlier work, and highlight all the things they know how to do now that they could not do in September. This helps students understand their goal is to improve from their current level, and no matter where they are starting, they can learn and grow.*

• *Researchers tell us that if you give students a letter grade along with feedback, all they focus on is the grade, and the value of the feedback is lost. Therefore I try to avoid giving grades, especially on first or second drafts. Instead, I try to give specific suggestions to guide students toward improvement. Rubrics that describe your expectations can be especially helpful with this.*

Continued on next page...



Ideas to Share

USE MUSIC

Many effective teachers successfully incorporate music into their classes. Music playing as students enter the classroom begins to set the mood for the day's class. You can let students take turns bringing in their favorite tapes to play before class or during breaks or recess. Soft music, played quietly in the background during individual seatwork can be pleasant and inviting. The beat of baroque compositions seems to work best for this.



Helpful Website for Teachers

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/index.html>



Site by The New York Times providing wonderful information "On This Day" in history.

The New Teacher Support Program

Teaching Secrets: Students Can Do Hard Things (cont...)

Look at the path to quality work as a ladder, not a leap, and support them as they climb.

- Sometimes students do not really know what high quality work looks like -- or how to produce it. The first time I asked students to do science projects, I was disappointed by some of the work they turned in (apparently assembled the night before with a roll of scotch tape and a magic marker). But when I thought about it, I realized they did not have any clear models.

The next time, when I introduced the assignment I shared some of the better projects I had saved. I also had the students take a close look at the projects and develop a list of characteristics associated with quality work. What do the great projects have? What do less successful projects look like? We took the notes from

this discussion and created a rubric the students could use to guide them as they worked. Then the students used the rubric to score their own projects with the help of their peers and make improvements before turning them in.

I've really come to see the power of peer review after years of practicing this teaching method. When students are involved in reviewing each other's work using a clear set of guidelines, they not only have a tool that promotes honest and objective judgments, they also become more familiar with the hallmarks of quality, and they can apply that understanding to their own work as well.

Our students can do hard things, but they do not always know that. High self-regard is important for all the kids we teach, but it is not built through empty praise. It grows as the student actually succeeds in creating quality work. True satisfaction comes when we know for sure that we have achieved excellence. Then let the celebration begin!—Anthony Cody



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—SAMUEL
JOHNSON

MEET THE PRINCIPALS: Monica Hopkins



School: **Gladeville Elementary**

How long have you been a principal at this school? **This is my 5th year as principal. I was assistant principal at Gladeville for 7 years.**

Colleges and universities attended: **MTSU—both undergraduate and graduate**

Special interests and hobbies: **My special interests include water sports, riding jet skis, and camping. If I am not on the water with my family, you can find me on the softball field or playing basketball with my children.**

Who or what inspires you each day as you do your job and why?

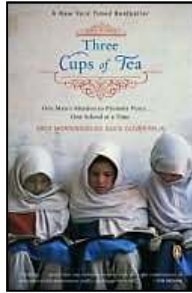
The students, faculty, and staff at Gladeville are the reason I come to work each day. They are dedicated and committed to making sure each student is successful. I have a wonder-

ful assistant principal who makes me laugh everyday. I look forward to seeing all the happy, smiling children—they keep me going.

If you had not gone into education, what type of job would you have chosen: **I can't imagine life outside education, but if I had not gone into education, I would still want to work with students. I would have been a high school athletic trainer or physical therapist specializing in sports injuries.**

What is the favorite part of your job: **The most favorite part of my job is the people. I love children, and I love watching them learn and grow into contributing citizens. The faculty and staff at Gladeville are the best! We all believe in our mission and vision. Teamwork and sense of family is what you feel when you come to the “Glade”.**

Suggested Reading for Teachers



Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time by Greg Mortenson, David Oliver Relin, David Oliver Relin

The astonishing, uplifting story of a real-life Indiana Jones and his humanitarian campaign to use education to combat terrorism in the Taliban's backyard

Anyone who despairs of the individual's power to change lives has to read the story of Greg Mortenson, a homeless mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built fifty-five schools-especially for girls-that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. As it chronicles Mortenson's quest, which has brought him into conflict with both enraged Islamists and uncomprehending Americans, Three Cups of Tea combines adventure with a celebration of the humanitarian spirit.



BARRY SWEENEY

AUTHOR OF "MENTORING THE NEW TEACHER"

- 1. Don't assume very much. Ask for clarification or check it out. 2. Don't apologize when you ask questions. You need to know, so asking is what you should do. 3. Use the resources that we provide you. Read the handouts, articles, and manuals. 4. Be yourself. We liked you when we hired you! 5. Be flexible and willing to adapt to situations. Rigidity wins a battle but loses wars and friends. 6. Keep your sense of humor and enjoy the children and your colleagues. 7. Celebrate the successes, but realize that we do not always succeed. 8. Plan some time for yourself. Protect your great attitude. 9. Listen a lot. Speak up when it's appropriate. 10. Pacing is vital. Ask others for their outline of the year's activities or curriculum and consider it. 11. Keep clear notes on each child in your elementary classroom. Keep notes on any secondary child when you are concerned. Documentation will sometimes seem a waste of time when you don't need it, but when you do need it, it will protect you.

New Teacher Support Group Participants



JOSHUA HARRIS MT. JULIET HIGH SCHOOL CDC 9-12 GRADES



SARAH JORDAN MT. JULIET ELEMENTARY 2ND GRADE

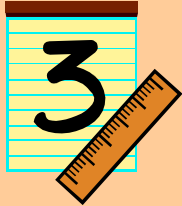
WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

"I became a teacher and coach to make a difference in peoples' lives. I worked at FedEx for 5 years previously before becoming a teacher and my only joy was when I got home from work. I enjoy working with kids and knowing that for some of them, school is the most exciting thing they do and you are the one that they look to for affection they may not get at home from their parents. They are always happy to see you."—Joshua Harris



WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

"Obviously, I love children. However, this is not enough. It is so rewarding to see children learn and grow. When you are teaching and you see there are a couple of students that don't understand, so you give them extra help. When they finally understand and it finally clicks with them and you get to see that light in their eyes...that's more rewarding as a paycheck."—Sarah Jordan



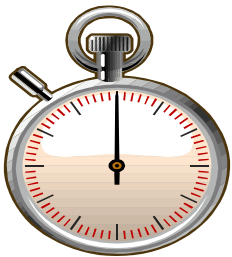
GOOD TEACHING: THE TOP TEN REQUIREMENTS

3—Good teaching is about listening, questioning, being responsive, and remembering that each student and class is different. It's about eliciting responses and developing the oral communication skills of the quiet students. It's about pushing students to excel; at the same time, it's about being human, respecting others, and being professional at all times.

Time Management Tips for Teachers

Continued from last week...

12. A classroom mail center with a "mailbox" for each student is an orderly and efficient way to manage all the back-and-forth paperwork that occurs in the classroom. Shop at an office supply store for a "literature organizer" with enough slots for each of your students. Students can use this mail center as a place to turn in assignments and class work and to send notes to each other and you.



You can use it to distribute graded assignments, comments, homework, and notes for home. This will eliminate a lot of time spent passing papers around during the day, plus students enjoy getting "mail."

13. Another option for student mailboxes is to buy some clear plastic hanging shoe holders. They make great mailboxes and you can see at a glance if notices have been picked up by students to take home.

Continued next week.....

Need a Laugh?

off the mark by Mark Parisi
www.offthemark.com



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