

RE-CAPPING THE REGIONAL



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[Dramatic Teaching](#)

[High School Girls Can Do Math, Physics and Engineering!](#)

[What Do Our Students Need to Know for College?](#)

[Child or Trophy: Is the Pursuit of Excellence Getting out of Hand?](#)

...and much more!



From the Editor

A total of 2249 people gathered on the campus of Campbell Hall in North Hollywood to celebrate the craft of teaching, proving once again that, as one year’s attendee said, “Teaching is the learning profession.”

Two hundred seventy one people presented one hundred seventy seven workshops and 95% of them were teachers in our schools. It is a fact that I brag about whenever I get the chance. I am so proud (and grateful!) of our teachers who generously share their expertise and experience. For many of the Regional Meeting workshops, you truly “had to be there,” as, by attendee preference, many workshops are “hands-on.” But for those of you who couldn’t make it we hope you will get the flavor of the day from sampling the articles that follow.



A neurologist-teacher from Santa Barbara Middle School tells us from the dual perspectives of middle school teacher and doctor what strategies are best for anchoring student learning in long-term memory. Another middle school teacher shares her long-term memory enhancer in history class – drama.

A former engineer with a mission to attract more women to his field proves that high school girls are



Clockwise: Hands-On Action; Checking Out the Exhibits; Trying Out an Exhibit; Waiting for the Bus

naturals at science and math, a librarian gathers several university librarians to talk about what our students really need to know to do

college level research, a tech director offers pointers on how, easily, you can make your teacher-website “interesting and useful,” and an assistant head tells us about a program of moral competency training at his school that not only helps students know, but know better.

In addition to our CAIS presenters, we are grateful as well for people like Sonia Levitin, Juliet Funt, and John Badalament who though currently working “outside” our community once were a part it, and/or have strong and continuing ties with it. And further, to Derek Mena who joined us as a representative from CAPHERD bringing news of the new standards in physical education.

So, enjoy - and for those of you in the North, mark your calendars and join us next year at the Northern Regional Meeting at Menlo School on Monday, March 19, 2007! Southerners stay tuned for another engaging slate of Professional Days in your field, or at your grade level.

Have a wonderful summer!

— Sandee Mirell

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Neurologist and middle school teacher combines her training and experience to add science to the art of teaching



Research-Based Teaching Strategies for Improving Learning Success

By Judy Willis

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The past two decades have provided extraordinary progress in our understanding of the nature of learning. Never before has neuroscience and classroom instruction been so closely linked. Now, educators can find evidence-based, neuro-imaging and brain-mapping studies to determine the most effective ways to teach because advances in technology enable us to view the working brain as it learns.

PLASTICITY AND PRUNING

It was a longtime misconception that brain growth stops with birth and is followed by a lifetime of brain cell death. Now we know that although most of the neurons where information is stored are present at birth, there is lifelong growth of the support and connecting cells that enrich the communication between neurons. These dendrites sprout from the arms (axons), or the cell body of the neuron.

Dendrites increase in size and number in response to learned skills, experience, and information. New dendrites grow as branches from frequently activated neurons. Once these dendrites are formed, it is the brain's plasticity that allows it to reshape and reorganize the networks of dendrite-neuron connections in response to increased or decreased use of these pathways. (Giedd 1999)

A 2004 report in *Nature* found that people who learned how to juggle increased the amount of gray matter in their occipital lobes (visual memory areas). When they stopped

practicing the juggling, the new gray matter vanished. A similar structural change appears to occur in people who learn and then don't practice a second language. (Draganst 2004). This decrease in connecting dendrites and other supporting brain connecting cells that are not used is called pruning.

Just as hedges are pruned to cut off errant sproutings, the brain prunes its own underactive cells. By the time we enter adolescence, our brain has chosen the final neurons it will keep throughout our adult life based on which cells are used and which are not. If pruning did not take place there would be too many crowded circuits in the brain (similar to too much working memory on our computer "desktop") for it to be efficient. To continue the computer analogy, if you have lots of data on your desktop, it takes your computer longer to turn on because all that data must be activated before you can start manipulating anything on the screen.

THE MORE WAYS SOMETHING IS LEARNED, THE MORE MEMORY PATHWAYS DEVELOP

Stimulating the growth of more dendrites and synaptic connections is one of the best things teachers can do for the brains of their students. The more ways the material to be learned is introduced to the brain and reviewed, the more dendritic pathways of access will be created. There will be more synaptic cell-to-cell-bridges, and these



pathways will be used more often, become stronger, and remain safe from pruning.

For example, offering information visually will set up a connection with the occipital lobes, the posterior lobes of the brain that process optical input. Subsequently, or simultaneously having students hear it will hook up a dendritic circuit with the temporal lobes, the lobes on the sides of the brain that process auditory input, as well as playing an important role in the regulation of emotion and memory processing.

The more regions of the brain that store data about a subject, the more interconnection there is. This redundancy means students will have more opportunities to pull up all of those related bits of data from their multiple storage areas in response to a single cue. This cross-referencing of data strengthens it into something we've learned rather than just memorized.

The goal of brain-based education is to structure lessons that will help students access and utilize more effective types of memory storage and retrieval that will literally change their brains. For instance, blind people who read Braille significantly increase the size of their somatosensory cortex, where the sense of touch in their right finger is processed. Similarly, violin players who use the fingers of their left hands to do the complicated movements along the strings show the increased size of their somatosensory regions of the brain's parietal lobe associated with the fingers of the left hand.

EDUCATORS AS MEMORY ENHANCERS - NOT JUST INFORMATION DISPENSERS

There are many classifications of the types of memory, and the one presented here is a conglomerate of several existing ones. From the most basic awareness of our environment, our memory skills progress to rote memory, working (short-term) memory, patterning, and connections to relational memory, and ultimately

long-term memory storage.

Rote memory is, unfortunately, the most commonly employed memory task for students in primary and secondary school. This involves "memorizing,"- and soon forgetting - facts that are often of little primary interest or emotional value to the student, such as a list of vocabulary words. Often these facts don't have obvious or engaging patterns or connections that give them context or relationship to each other or to the student's lives.

Working memory, or short-term memory, holds data in mind for seconds to minutes. The challenge students face is to move information from their working memories into their long-term memories. If they don't do this within a few minutes of receiving the information, it can be lost. (Think about the last time someone gave you driving directions which seemed so clear when you heard them, but were lost to you once you made the second right turn.)

To keep this newly learned material from slipping away, it needs to enter the network of the brain's wiring. Teachers help students do this by activating previous knowledge that relates to the new material. This prior knowledge exists in stored loops of brain cell connections (circuits of neurons connected by branching axons and dendrites that carry the information as electrochemical signals). Effective teaching uses strategies to help students recognize relationships between new and already stored information and then connect the new with the existing memory creating a *relational memory* that is patterned to be recognized by the neural system that transfers data the brain's *long-term memory* storage areas.

After repeated practice, working memories are set down as permanent neuronal circuits of axons and dendrites ready to be activated when the information is needed. When a memory has been recalled often, its

neuronal circuits are highly developed because of their repeated activation. A phrase that describes this construction of connections based on repeated association of one piece of information with another is, "Cells that fire together, wire together." When neurons fire in sync with one another, they are more likely to form new connections. As the connections grow stronger by repeated stimulation, a given neuron becomes more likely to trigger another connected neuron. (Chugani 1998) Like exercising a muscle, these circuits then become more efficient and easier to access and activate. Practice results in repeated stimulation of the memory circuit. Like hikers along a trail who eventually carve out a depression in the road, repeated practice stimulates cells in the memory circuit such that the circuit is reinforced and becomes stronger. This means it can be quickly turned from off to on, and switched on through a variety of cues coming in from the senses.

BUILDING STRONGER MEMORY CIRCUITS

Some of the strategies suggested by neuro-imaging are ones that have students personalize information to be learned, thereby further activating the areas of the brain that help form memories. Others encourage students to connect with the information with as many senses as possible. They can visualize an electron orbiting the nucleus of an atom, mimic the buzz of electricity as it whizzes by, or feel a tingling associated with the electron's negative charge by rubbing a balloon against their arm and feeling their hair move. If they then draw a sketch of their visualizations and verbally communicate them to partners, or write about them in their own words, multiple brain pathways will be stimulated to enter long-term memory because they have personalized and interacted with the information.

When teachers help students build their working memories through

a variety of activities, they are helping them stimulate multiple sensory intake centers in their brains, building multiple pathways leading to the same memory storage destination. Thus, more brain connections are available when students need to recall that memory, and the memory can be retrieved by more than one type of cue. If the learned information was taught with visual and auditory associations, it can be recalled by the student using their either sound or visual memory.

SURPRISE!

Consider the technique of surprise to light up students' brains and illuminate the pathways to memory storage. Start a lesson with an unanticipated demonstration, or have something new/unusual in the classroom to spark student attention and curiosity. It can be anything from playing a song as they enter, to greeting them in a hat, cape, or costume. If students sense novel experiences, from demonstrations, descriptions, anecdotes, or even the enthusiasm in their teacher's voice, they will be more likely to connect with the information that follows. Students should then have opportunities to interact with the information they need to learn. The goal is for them to actively discover, interpret, analyze, process, practice, and/or discuss the information, so it will move beyond working and be processed in the frontal lobe regions devoted to executive function.

Strategies to achieve these goals include partner discussions and Think-Pair-Share. Students can write *dendrites* (a more enticing name for class notes that gives their note taking more status). They might add a sketch in their notebooks along side their comments about the surprise, the new information they learned, and their personal response to it (What did I see/hear/smell? What did I learn? What surprised me? What do I want to know more about? What did this remind me of?)

EPISODIC MEMORY AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Decades ago, my high school chemistry teacher slowly released hydrogen sulfide (rotten egg smell) from a hidden container he opened just before we entered his classroom. A few minutes after we took our seats and he began his lecture, a foul odor permeated throughout the classroom grabbing our attention. We groaned, laughed, looked around for the offending source. To an outside observer entering our class at that time, we would have appeared unfocused and definitely not learning anything. However, this demonstration, literally led me by the nose to follow his description of the diffusion of gasses through other gasses. It is likely that during that class I created two or three pathways to the information about gas diffusion that I processed through my senses and ultimately stored in my long-term memory. Since then, that knowledge has been available for me to retrieve by thinking of an egg or by remembering the emotional responses as the class reacted to the odor permeating the room. Once I make the connection, I am able to recall the scientific facts linked to his demonstration.

Event memories, such as the one that was stored that day in chemistry class, are tied to specific emotionally or physically charged events (strong sensory input) and by the emotional intensity of the events to which they are linked. Because the dramatic event powers its way through the neural pathways of the emotionally pre-activated limbic system into memory storage, the associated hitchhiking scholastic information gets pulled along with it. Recollection of the academic material occurs when the emotionally significant event comes to mind, unconsciously or consciously. To remember the lesson, students can cue up the dramatic event to which it is linked.

“The goal of brain-based education is to structure lessons that will help students access and utilize more effective types of memory storage and retrieval that will literally change their brains.”

It is not, nor should it be, a teacher's role to turn a classroom into a video arcade. We don't want students to be primarily motivated by the external rewards of bells and whistles. An ideal event memory lesson would be one where students' brains are stimulated by having them participate in a challenging and engaging student-centered activity that simultaneously activates multiple sensory systems and executive functions as students strive to make sense of experience. The goal is to provide experiences that enable students to interact with knowledge in ways that arouse their physical senses and positive emotions, or to connect the new information with past experiences and interests. This process of connecting new information to related experiences or memories is aptly named relational memory.



RELATIONAL MEMORY - LIGHTING THE PATHWAYS

Learning consists of reinforcing connections between neurons. Relational memory takes place when students learn something that adds to what they have already mastered; they engage or expand on "maps" already present in the brain. This process engages more executive functions as students' brains scan their stored memory banks seeking relationships that help them put new connections in context.


How does relational memory apply to teaching? We already know that rote memory is inefficient, but now there is visible evidence to encourage helping students make connections and see patterns. Patterning is the process whereby the brain perceives and generates patterns by relating new with previously learned material or chunking material into pattern systems it has used before. Education is about increasing the patterns students can use, recognize, and communicate. As the ability to see and work with patterns expands, the executive functions are enhanced. Whenever new material is presented in such a way that students see relationships, they generate greater brain cell activity (formation of new neural connections) and achieve more successful long-term memory storage and retrieval.

Teaching information in patterns can be as simple as presenting material in chunked format. Because the working memory has a capacity for immediate recall limited to five to nine pieces of unrelated items, if information is separated into chunks, students can remember more successfully. Just as phone numbers and social security numbers are divided into chunks of three or four, teachers can chunk things from biologic genus-species names to states and capitals, into groupings of three or four, ideally with some commonality that relates them.

GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Graphic organizers help students see relationships and pattern new information for memory storage. I consider them one of the most nourishing of all dendrite sprout foods we can offer to nurture our students' brain growth. They provide a creative alternative to rote memorization because they enable students to make connections, see patterns, access previously stored related memories, and expand upon existing memory circuitry. Further, they coincide with the brain's style of patterning. When teachers organize and present material in ways that stimulate students' brains to create meaningful and relevant connections to previously stored memories, they can make associations, discover patterns, sort, and store the new data as relational memory, and then as long-term memory. Thus, the process enhances the brain's natural tendency to construct meaning by forming patterns. The best graphic organizers engage the students' imaginations and positive emotions in a creative process whereby they recognize, sort, and discover patterns for themselves. In addition, the use of graphic organizers to connect information in meaningful relationships allows students time for reflecting about the information. The result is that they can ultimately go beyond regurgitating rote memorization to the higher cognitive process of using the information in significant ways. The relational memories they store will be available for critical thinking and other executive functions to use for meaningful problem solving.

Graphic organizers are intrinsically engaging, as they require students to interpret and interact with the material. When students create their own categories (personal relevance) the connection is increased. However, even if teachers construct a framework for their organizers, they can help them see the logic of the structure they created. When students make

this connection of new to previously-stored memories they experience the sentiment described in the quote from Doris Lessing, "That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way." 

Editor's note: Judy's book, *Research-based Strategies to Ignite Student Learning*, will be available from ASCD in late May.

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Reinforcing and differentiating learning through the use of drama yields many benefits



Dramatic Teaching

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When my middle school students can quote dialogue from *Napoleon Dynamite* or *Pirates of the Caribbean* verbatim but can't remember the Intolerable Acts to save their lives, it becomes obvious that somehow I have to make the curriculum more relevant and memorable. My response is to use drama. It grabs their attention, addresses all of Gardner's multiple intelligences, and provides ample opportunity for differentiation. Drama, like differentiation, is:

- proactive
- more qualitative than quantitative
- aimed at offering multiple approaches to content, process, and product
- student-centered
- a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction.

So for the past 10 years we have been presenting an original spring production that reaches across the curriculum to reinforce academics, character education, physical education and the arts. Veterans of our plays come back to tell me of connections they have made because of what they helped create in middle school,

and students whom I teach today remember and can discuss specifics of performances they attended years ago. The process is not as difficult as you might imagine.

This year's play tackles ciphers, "mean girls," the Civil War, mental mapping, logic, cultural diversity and regionalism in a little comedy whose working title is "Confederate Gold." I'll let you know how it turns out. A recap of last year's program, *Something to Believe In*, will give you a sense of the entire process.

I always begin by brainstorming with the students. First, we wanted to discover the commonality between all societies. We came up with the concepts of curiosity, self-centeredness, a sense of justice, and a need to believe in something larger than ourselves as common denominators for eleven to fourteen year olds throughout history. Following the formula of ancient myths, our characters would be sent on a journey to test their resources, values and intellects. With this student input in mind, I wrote a story of two freshly made mortals who want to know what's out there, why are we here, and (most importantly of all) what about me? You could reinterpret a Greek myth or a fairy tale with many of the same results.



Choosing to visit Norse, Egyptian, Celtic, and Mayan cosmologies reinforced students' studies of the mythology, geography and history of those cultures. The Celtic gods were included primarily because one of the students does competitive Celtic dance and was willing to teach it to the rest. Plus, I really like their jewelry.

During the rehearsal process we discussed similarities between ancient cosmologies, as well as the universal need for something larger than ourselves to explain the world and give hope and purpose. We did not decide as a group what that something was, but our discussions enabled deliberation about the character virtues that we teach, and soul searching about the individual's place in society and the universe.

We researched how different mythological systems would cause characters to behave, what sort of geography influenced the development of these systems, and what societies evolved around those beliefs. Architecture, art, costuming, and dance were discovered, viewed, examined and reproduced as well. The Mayan understanding of the solar system and calendar linked to both science and math, as did the Egyptian embalming process and pyramids. When many students spontaneously decided to investigate myths further and enthusiastically shared their new knowledge, I knew genuine learning had occurred.

Students love to dance if they have a safe venue in which to perform. I am not a dancer, but I do have a vast repertoire of old movies to visually demonstrate almost any type of step. With a modicum of guidance students create amazing spectacles of rhythm, movement, and energy. We have done square dancing, swing, Indian dance, tango, merengue, hula, Celtic dance, jazz, hip hop,

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lyrical, waltz, interpretive, and tap, all without me knowing a *plie* from a box step. I can't sing either, but if a student wants to do an appropriate song I will find a way to work it in. Music appreciation and history are natural by-products of the process. Allowing students to do what they love within an acceptable framework is surprisingly doable and the rewards are enormous.

Geometry, algebra, and plain old adding and subtracting are reinforced in set design and costuming. Science concepts of simple machines, chemistry, sound and the physics of lighting can all be made into lessons that strengthen existing skills. Sets and costumes also present excellent opportunities to infuse art into the process. If you're not an artist, it's amazing what can be done with transparencies and an overhead projector. The Internet provides pictures and patterns for costumes, and thrift stores are great sources for period clothing to complete your production.

Today's students are immersed in a popular culture that teaches with various forms of theatre whether we like it or not. With some imagination and innovation, we can seize that medium for productive, instructive experiences. Using drama to teach reaches unsuspecting students on many different levels because students learn and retain best when they are part of the creative process. Whether you purchase plays, adapt classics, or write your own, when the emphasis is on the process, the end result may not be Broadway, but it will be appreciation, retention and excitement about learning and that's pretty dramatic teaching. ☞

Statistics showing that women are still under-represented in his field as compared to medicine and law motivates a retired engineer to become a teacher in a girls' school



High School Girls Can Do Math, Physics and Engineering!

By Jack Blumenthal

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One of the things that led me to Mayfield Senior School, a Catholic girls' high school in Pasadena, after 40 years in engineering, was a concern that women are very underrepresented in the profession and in physics and math as well. From a national standpoint, it seems to me that we are not taking advantage of the intellectual capacity of half the nation when seeking new engineers, physicists and mathematicians. While there are many more women in engineering today than there were when I was going to school, women still represent a fairly small fraction when compared with the percentage of women in law or medicine, or business. One of my goals in coming to Mayfield, was to see if I could find ways to encourage young women to consider a career in engineering, physics, or math. I particularly wanted to teach in high school rather than college, because it is in high school that the students first really consider their career choices.

TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM ENGINEERING!

At first, teaching young women in high school was a huge cultural shock. After four years of engineering graduate school and 36 years at an aerospace company,

I found the teaching environment to be totally different from the male dominated engineering environment I was used to. The bad news was that no one told me what you "couldn't" do in teaching young women. Of course, that was also the good news. I found, however, that most of the keys to successful engineering applied outstandingly well to teaching young women. Communication, innovation, good judgment, enthusiasm, and teamwork are all very important in engineering, and I found them to be of equal importance in teaching young women. The idea of having students work together in teams does not seem to be widely used in high school, but I find it to be a useful tool particularly since high school girls love to talk to each other, and are very good at explaining things to one another.

I try to bring in problems from my industrial experience to show students a little of what engineering is about and how what they learn in school applies in the "real world". For example, after the Columbia accident, I showed my honors students how to estimate the speed at which a piece of insulation foam could have struck the wing of the shuttle using only high school physics. Our estimate of several hundred feet per second was made well before NASA announced the probable cause

“The **bad news** was that no one told me what you “couldn’t” do in teaching young women. Of course, that was also the **good news.**”

of the accident.

In another example, I have students design a square bottom cardboard box that is made from a single square piece of cardboard that has a volume of 100 cubic inches, and minimizes the amount of cardboard that is used in order to reduce the manufacturing cost. This is the first time that any of our students have heard about the engineering requirements of a product.

A third example is to design a helium balloon that will lift an elephant. Students are surprised to find that simple measurements of the lift and volume of toy helium balloons of different sizes can be used to develop a math model that accurately predicts the size of a balloon that will lift a 1000 kg elephant.

One of the keys that I am finding to teaching math to young women is that many of them have been brought up thinking they are not competent in math. In almost every case, I have experienced this is simply not true, at least at the high school level. One of the great joys of my new profession is helping girls discover just how good they really are in math. In fact, some of them are much better than their teacher.

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

I have found that high school girls seem to know a lot about what doctors, lawyers and biologists do,

but almost nothing about what engineers and physicists do, in particular, what university engineering, or physics research is all about. One of the advantages that I have from starting my teaching career after many years as an engineer and executive is that I have a number of professorial contacts at the local universities. Through these contacts, I have been able to place one or two students each summer at Cal Tech, UCLA, and USC in laboratory internships. These students, universally, were very warmly received and got a wonderful opportunity to learn at a very early age about top-level university research. Since almost all of my summer intern students went on to become science, or engineering majors at major research universities, I think that it is likely that the internships influenced their career decisions.

THERMODYNAMICS

Over the course of the seven years that I have been at Mayfield, I have occasionally taught a class in upper division college engineering thermodynamics to one or two or three talented high school seniors. I suspect that this class is probably unique in high school. Since I taught thermodynamics at UCLA many years ago as a graduate student, I think that I can judge accurately the level of engineering potential of

these high school students by their performance in this class. What I found was that all of these young women were really better than I was, and that one of them was extraordinary. This one student recently graduated from Cal Tech in physics and is now working on a Ph.D. under a Nobel Prize winner.

ARE THESE “CRAZY” TECHNIQUES USEFUL?

The question that I have, of course, is whether some of the things outlined above have been helping our young women make decisions about their future. I think it is important to point out that Mayfield is a school that strives to develop young women’s talents in all areas, and that the students here run the full spectrum of academic ability. By no stretch are we exclusively a math and science school, or one that takes only the very top middle school students. That having been said, in the last six years seven of our recent graduates have gone on to Cal Tech in engineering, physics or science, three students are at Cal in math and science, one student is at MIT, and for the first time ever we have two students in the School of Engineering at UCLA. Since Mayfield only graduates about 70 students per year, it would seem that some of what we are doing is having an impact.

I believe that what I have outlined above could be applied broadly to help encourage young women to consider a career in engineering or the physical sciences. In particular, all of the top engineering schools today are seeking women, and I think that high school teachers could look through the faculty profiles at major universities, make contact, and arrange for summer research internships for their students quite easily.

What Do Our Students Need to Know for College?

by Sarah Knetzer Davis

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As a librarian working in a college preparatory environment, I often see projects assigned that require university-level resources, or possibly even a trip to a university library. I recently started to wonder whether or not our middle and high school projects give students a realistic picture of what research is like at college. Additionally, in this day of Wikipedia and Google, I was curious about the types of resources that college students are actually using, and what are the ways I can better prepare them for the rigor of academia.

At the CAIS Spring Regional Meeting, over 20 teachers and librarians had a chance to ask two university librarians: "Are we adequately preparing our students for college-level research? What kinds of projects are undergraduates actually doing in college? And is it important that we take our juniors and seniors to visit a college library before they graduate from high school?"

Karen Phillips, Library Director of Brentwood School, posed these questions to librarians Esther Grassian of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Lynn Lampert, of California State University, Northridge. Here are their suggestions when it comes to prepping students for work at the college level.

Teach students that research is a process

We can help our students better understand that a first draft is not a last draft by "scaffolding projects." For instance, instead of assigning a long research paper, consider giving them the project in chunks, or ask them to turn in just an annotated bibliography or a "research proposal."

Students turn in better work when teachers, or librarians work with them to brainstorm topics, define keyword search terms, and choose topics that are personally interesting to them. (UCLA has a topic narrowing site on their library website: <<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/topic/index.htm>>).

Teach students to understand the difference between popular and scholarly resources

Students often can't distinguish between a popular magazine (such as *Newsweek*) and academic journals (such as *Political Research Quarterly*). Teach students how to access scholarly articles and give them the opportunity to practice reading these articles, which are usually longer, and rich with academic research and language. Most libraries have free access to these articles through online databases, so encourage students to seek out the best resource, rather than the first resource that they find.

When creating assignments, avoid overly strict limits,

such as research papers that ask for "only one reference source," since students are often unclear about what a reference source is. Teach students about specialized encyclopedias (such as the *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*) - they are great for introducing a topic. College students are encouraged to use both print and online resources; however, some professors might assign projects that allow students to use only one internet site and have it not be a ".com."

Teach students how to avoid plagiarism how to cite their sources.


Students often have difficulty learning how to balance their research notes with their personal thoughts. Teachers, or librarians should take the time to teach exercises that help students skim research material, take notes, and summarize what they've read. Discuss the serious nature of plagiarism by showing the ramifications of current incidents involving popular authors.

Don't assume that students know how to cite their sources, and that every student knows how to use a particular "brand" of citation - point out the difference between APA, Chicago, MLA, etc.

Develop a relationship with your local university's outreach librarian

If you would like to take your students to visit a university library, always call ahead so that the librarian has the opportunity to fully prepare for a class visit. If you are going to send your students individually to a college library, require that your students take the assignment with them since they often forget portions, or misinterpret their assignments.

University librarians want students to feel good about finding information, and to feel that they are successful in their research. Therefore, ask students to prepare before going to the university library. Require students to define their topics, consider the types of resources they are going to use, see what their school library has, and determine what they are going to need. Remind students that most university library catalogs are available online, and encourage them to practice searching. Further, encourage students to practice online searching using remote databases (such as JSTOR or ProQuest) and teach them criteria for evaluating the articles they find.

Lastly, the most important lesson we learned is true for the K-12 environment as well. Teach students to develop good questioning skills, and encourage them to be confident when approaching the librarian. The library staff enjoys working with students and wants them to be successful in all aspects of their education. 

Tech director offers pointers on developing meaningful – and time-saving – websites

Making Your Teacher Website Useful and Interesting

By Christine Lorenz

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Recently, at the 2006 Southern Regional Meeting at Campbell Hall, Adrienne Coffield, Jayme Johnson, and I were happily surprised to find the room packed with teachers who either wanted some advice on how to jazz up their current site, had never created a site before, or were just looking for inspiration.

We began with a question. "Why have a website at all?" Personally, I've seen too many teacher-created websites that were built simply because the teachers felt they needed to "keep up with the other teachers." A teacher's website should have a mission and a meaning; otherwise, it serves little purpose and is of limited interest. Students and their parents appreciate a site that has PURPOSE.

So why have a website?

First and foremost, what information does your site's audience hope to find there? Will your website enhance your teaching, or your students' learning, or organization skills? A truly useful site will. Students, students' parents, and even students' tutors generally use the website to find up-to-date information regarding homework, class projects, tests and quizzes, grades (password protected, of course), and upcoming events. Your website, if updated regularly, can keep sick children who stay home informed and connected to the classroom. No more phone calls asking you to send Johnnie's homework home with Sally. Instead, stu-

dents know they can view assignments on the website, and it's now their responsibility to gather assignments instead of yours. Your website can be a portal into your classroom, allowing parents and other family members to see what's happening firsthand via movies, podcasts, photo albums, or a gallery of students' work.

For example, the traditional classroom bulletin board where student artwork, special awards, and field trip photos are generally tacked up can be posted on your online bulletin board instead of, or as well as, your traditional one.

I know what you're thinking. "Who has time for all of this?" (Not to mention, "What the heck is a podcast?") The initial set-up of your website can certainly take some time, but, if planned well, you can build your site in such a way that updates can be quick and painless. Teachers who post their lessons online also find that their websites aren't just useful this year, but next year, and the year after. Slight modifications as your lessons evolve take little time and can be simple to update. Many teachers think of a website project as an *addition* to their regular duties, but a well designed site can free you from many of the daily tasks we teachers sometimes loathe - too many phone calls with parents, the long lines at the copy machine, too many phone calls with parents, (no, that wasn't a typo).

At the beginning of the school year, show your new website to parents at Open House, and make sure they know what they can find there. Refer them to it often

throughout the year and keep it updated and you've just alleviated the confusion that can frequently happen when a homework assignment is translated from Johnnie's mouth to Momma's ears in the car ride home after school. Keep your site interesting with awesome content and students and parents won't have to be reminded to visit...they'll WANT to.

Why NOT have a website?

As devil's advocate, let's discuss some reasons NOT to have a website. Here are some of the most common reasons I've heard:

- I don't know where to begin.
- I don't see the value in it...
- I've been teaching successfully without it for years.
- I'm not a technology person!
- I don't have TIME!
- It's too difficult to keep up to date.
- I love the copy machine.
- I don't want to make it too easy for students. (Yes, I've actually heard this one!)
- Some of our school families don't use computers.
- I don't know what to put on my site.
- I don't have any support if I need it.
- I'm afraid!

Many of these are valid reasons to contemplate while in the process of starting a website project. Fear of technology is a common roadblock to starting a website for the first time. There are simple solutions, however, and even the most intimidated teacher can create a basic and easy-to-update site using free services on the Internet. Breaking tradition and starting new trends in your methods can be hard to do, too. Why fix it if it ain't broke, right? But, how many times have we taken a risk and said to ourselves, "Why didn't I do that sooner???" Our students have grown up in a technology-rich environment from the minute they could blink. Like it or not, their generation uses the Internet for *everything*. Providing them with online resources for your class is

helpful and they'll use it effectively if you make it worth their while. As far as issues of tech support are concerned, deciding what kind of site you have time and adequate support for is crucial before beginning to plan or create.

What makes a website interesting and useful?

Before we discuss how to go about creating your site, let's talk about what should be on it. Content is the most important thing to consider when creating a site. Students and parents will visit your site if there is important content posted there regularly. "Regularly" can mean daily, weekly or monthly, depending on what's happening in your classroom and how much information you post at a time. The more frequently your information changes, the more likely people are going to visit it to keep up. A website that only gets updated a few times a year is going to be forgotten quickly and go unvisited.

Important content, such as lessons, homework assignments, study guides, spelling lists, calendars, and grades, are some of the more *useful* things to include on your site. If you are typing these kinds of documents and giving them as hard copy handouts anyway, simply save them as PDF documents and post them on your site for users to download. This doesn't even need to look pretty - it's just a great resource for your visitors. This takes very little extra time, and you now have an online archive of documents you've passed out to students.

Multimedia is a GREAT way to make your site *interesting* and entice visitors to your site. Pictures, video, and podcasts are always a huge draw for your audience. Kids LOVE to see pictures of themselves, and parents enjoy seeing their children at work and play. Be sure to draw up contracts to be signed by parents every school year that clearly state whether or not photos of their children can be published

on your website or on other materials (brochures, school calendars, etc.) and refer to these whenever posting photos of children.

As a rule, photos of children should not have students' names shown and should always, if possible, be protected by password so only your school community has access. A podcast allows your visitors to download an audio recording with images and/or video of an event happening in your classroom. Bruce Harlan, a science teacher at St. Matthew's Parish School, has an incredible class website that, in addition to informative content about what's going on in the classroom, also includes a daily blog, photos of kids working in the classroom, amazing video of kids performing experiments, and the recent addition of a podcast. Wikipedia says: *Podcasting's essence is about creating content (audio or video) for an audience that wants to listen when they want, where they want, and how they want.* Bruce interviewed students on "Solar Oven Day" as they described their solar ovens and gave advice to upcoming students. He took photos of each child with their solar ovens, and ran the photos as a slideshow as the audio recording played. What makes this different from a standard video? It's downloadable to an iPod, or personal computer so the listener can take the file with them! Users can subscribe to his podcasts and download them whenever Bruce Harlan posts a new one. COOL!

What kind of site should I have?

Depending on your level of expertise, available time allocated to your website's upkeep, and your support needs, you can design a site that will fit neatly into your life.

The Basic Site This website has the most basic information about your class and takes the least amount of time to design or update. This is gen-

erally a static website that never, or rarely, changes. This site might have your contact information, a blurb about your teaching philosophy, or a biography about you, a yearly calendar of major events, and a brief description of the year's curriculum. As mentioned earlier, this site isn't going to get a lot of hits and probably will be forgotten after the beginning of the school year. You might use something like <http://www.schoolnotes.com> for a site like this.

The Weekly or Monthly Update

This site, also very basic, has a lot of static information, as well as a section that is updated frequently and easily. Teachers with very busy schedules opt for this solution and make it work effectively. They might update the spelling list, the student jobs, a weekly calendar, upcoming events, reminders to parents, or other things that can quickly be typed up and posted. There are a lot of free and easy-to-use online resources for creating a site like this that even the least tech-savvy teacher can manage with confidence. One of my favorites is <http://www.schoolnotes.com>. There are a number of others to investigate that might be more appealing to you. Check into some of these other free or inexpensive online website services: <http://teacherwebsite.com/>, <http://teacher.scholastic.com/homepagebuilder/>, <http://www.myteacherpages.com/>, <http://teacherweb.com/Intro.htm>, <http://www.classnotesonline.com/>

The Weekly or Daily Update (intermediate version)

This version is going to require a bit more time and effort to maintain. It most likely has multimedia in addition to written text. This type of site can be easily created and updated using software like iWeb or iBlog for Mac users, or Frontpage for Windows. Personally, I'm a Mac user, and I generally use Dreamweaver

to create my websites. I recently used iWeb to build a site and was impressed by how simple it was, and how customizable the templates were. This is a great solution for someone new to web design, who wants to break out of the commonly used online services that provide a useful website, but little unique style.

The Weekly or Daily Update (advanced version)

The advanced website is most likely going to be created by someone who has previous experience building websites, or who has a bit of extra time, energy and interest to devote to learning new skills. This site will be unique and personal, and will likely require the most time to update and maintain. More advanced web design software, like Macromedia's Dreamweaver, is used to create a site like this. Dreamweaver takes a bit of time to master, but allows for the most creativity and flexibility with style. Coupled with some of the other software available through Macromedia, Fireworks and Flash, for example, you can build a site worthy of an award.

The Blog

The blog is a great way to document what is going on in your classroom AND give students, or other visitors the chance to comment on your postings. A blog is an online, daily updated (or as often as you like) journal. There are many free blogging services that you can subscribe to. I like www.blogger.com, and use it for a number of purposes. You can host your blogger.com site on your school server if you'd prefer. A blog is one of the quickest and easiest ways to document the goings-on of your classroom. It allows you to post pictures if you're so inclined. A blog can be created and maintained with ease by both the "newbie" and the experienced web developer.


Tips for building your site:

Plan ahead. It's always smart to

have a visual plan of your site before you begin. I like to either draw it out on paper, or use a software tool like Inspiration so I can get a good look at how things are going to connect. Here's a screen shot of what a simple site might look like using Inspiration to plan it out:



- Keep it simple.
- Avoid long pages of scrolling text. Use similar page layouts throughout your site...similar colors, same link graphics...consistency counts.
- Use common fonts, like Times or Geneva.
- Only LINKS should be underlined.
- Keep the file size of graphics as small as possible.
- Use only meaningful graphics.
- Stay away from busy backgrounds and bright colors.
- Don't overdo it on the cute animated gifs! They pull attention away from what's important and can get annoying.
- Include navigational links on every page.
- Thoroughly test all of your links to make sure they function properly.

Your classroom website can be a really useful and interesting resource for your students and families if you keep in mind that it should have a meaningful purpose, should relay important information, and be designed with your busy schedule in mind. Good luck! 

Right attitude, *aka* moral competency, takes its place among academic, athletic, and artistic competencies as part of what defines this school's culture.



Cultivating a Climate of Moral Competency

by Kevin Yaley

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While most independent schools strive for and achieve a high level of competency in the three A's (academics, arts and athletics), independent schools are now embracing the challenge of achieving the same level of competency in the fourth A – attitude - a term that captures the common idioms of ethics, character education and morality (and one that starts with the letter "A!")

How does a school successfully develop the fourth competency?

We must first ask ourselves the following question: What defines our school? I would suggest that all good lists would include the following: mission, students, faculty, community, program and curriculum, college placement, attention to the individual, and *climate*.

A school's climate is defined by its orientation (*Where are we headed?*), relationships (*Who matters to us?*), practices (*How do we spend our time?*), priorities (*Who or what comes first?*), procedures (*How do we operate?*), protocols (*What are our traditions?*), and competencies (*What we are good at?*).

While no one is necessarily more influential than the other, I will suggest that the perception of a school's climate is heavily influenced by its competencies. And why not? It is the question asked of a school more than any other. From the first admissions open house to graduation, this question, in its many iterations, is constantly being put to the school. What defines your school? What makes your school different? What are your school's skills, proficiencies and areas of exper-

tise? What does your school excel at?

To begin, I would suggest that schools look at the development of right attitude, or moral competency, in the very same way we look at the first three (academic, athletic and artistic). In other words, similar to our approach in teaching and coaching, moral competency is achieved by providing the child with sufficient resources, qualifications, skill, and knowledge.

Moral competency is best understood as teaching a student *to know better*.

Incompetence is nothing less than the absence of ability and knowledge. Most of us do not set out with the intention of achieving incompetence. However, a simple deficiency in knowledge can often lead to a serious misjudgment. It is not uncommon for a student's response to choosing poorly to be, "I didn't *know* any better." More often than not, they also didn't *know* how, or *know* why. Acts that start out as well intended may become seriously misguided simply because of the absence of knowledge and understanding. The reason a student may be acting without any sign of a moral compass, may be because they truly *don't* know any better.

The fact of the matter is this. It is hard enough to do better. It is harder still to do better when you don't even *know better*.

It is important to note that while moral competency does not guarantee we will always do the right thing, it does seem to increase the odds. Teacher instruction, class discussion, essay writing, collaborative projects, and professional assessment don't guarantee academic

success, but, again, they sure do increase the odds.

Like the development of the first three competencies (academics, arts and athletics), the development of our moral competency requires much of the same: people, time, attention, energy, balance, guidance, modeling, understanding and knowledge. I would suggest that good schools are doing most of this and doing it quite well. Ironically, the one that schools might be giving the least amount of attention to is the last – knowledge. So what is a school to do? In an effort to develop the moral competency of our students, the school can focus on enhancing a child's moral knowledge (*to know better*), through moral fitness and imagination.

Much like physical fitness, we

are not born into moral fitness, it does not come without much time, energy and sweat; it is not mentally passive; and it is just as hard to maintain moral fitness as it is to achieve it. Remember Aristotle: *We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.*


In his groundbreaking work, *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*, Rushworth Kidder imparts to the reader the importance of moral conditioning and fitness. Through guided teachings and discussions, students are given the tools and knowledge to successfully navigate through seemingly irreconcilable conflicts, developing the competencies that will ready them when faced with real life dilemmas.¹

Larry Hinman, professor of eth-

ics at the University of San Diego, further suggests that one of the most appropriate tools for students and schools in developing moral competency is engaging in discussions of moral imagination. By providing children with age-appropriate situations of everyday life in an environment that is safe and supportive, the imagination of the students will often lead to what Hinman calls the "moral sweet spot" – the discovery of goodness in a seemingly bad situation, the common ground beneath seemingly irreconcilable positions, and the point at which altruism and self-interest coincide.²

Teaching students how to use reason and imagination to resolve disagreement and conflict is fundamental in developing a student's moral competency. It is teaching the student *to know better*. Providing children with the skills, tools, and expertise (moral fitness and moral imagination) *to know better*, will not only help our students to do the right thing, but to do the right thing *well*.

Why teach moral competency in independent schools? If the mission of our schools is to graduate intelligent, autonomous, responsible, and courageous young people, and if the focus of our educational experience is to enhance the character and intellect, decency and literacy, goodness and knowledge of those students, then it would be irresponsible not to develop the competencies of the four A's – Academics, Arts, Athletics and Attitude.

With a little imagination and a bit of hard work, we hope to graduate students who *know better*. 

At Francis Parker School we have challenged ourselves to capture the moral competencies that we would like our students to achieve.

They are as follows:

Moral Competency at the Lower School (STRIVE)

Seek always to do your best.

Treat people and property with respect.

Revere the truth.

Invest in your future.

Value school rules, your heritage, and personal responsibility.

Enrich the world for all.

Moral Competency at the Middle School

Know the good, desire the good, do the good.

Moral Competency at the Upper School

Know better & choose well

¹ Kidder, Rushworth, *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*, (New York, New York: Harpers Collins Publishers, 1995).

² <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/presentations/FrancisParker/index.html>



Award-winning author shows teachers how to use literature, art, role-playing, self-evaluation and group discussion to teach values.



Finding Our Heroes and Ourselves Through Literature

by Sonia Levitin

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Teaching values has always been a bit tricky. Whose values? And how would we teach values without preaching?

These questions have plagued educators since the early sixties, when the free speech movement tipped the balance from authoritarian teacher control to student activism. Now we find ourselves somewhere in between, with the added dilemmas of family fragmentation and serious polarization between the secular and the religious world.

So, what is a person to do with a roomful, a school full, a community full of young people who will soon be set on the road to adulthood and freedom of choice - children who turn increasingly to us, their teachers, for guidance? We must help them find their heroes in places that are simultaneously comfortable and challenging, exciting and rewarding.

At the CAIS Regional Meeting workshop, I used characters and scenes from my own fiction books - written for students from grade two through high school. As an author and teacher, I realize that I pursue my writing with a dual desire—to entertain and to teach. Most authors and artists want to share the things they love and value, the wisdom they have gleaned, the regrets they feel, the successes they celebrate. All these values and emotions go into the making of a fiction book, and all these are rich resources for the teacher and the reader.

Most teachers and parents agree that what we desperately need now are values that emphasize personal and social responsibility; commitments that move us toward individual fulfillment and that also promote the greater good. Service learning, for example, is often seen as a separate part of the curriculum, a unit of study where students learn about community needs and then apply themselves to helping meet those needs. Service learning sets the student on the road to personal responsibility and societal gain. However, that is only part of the goal. A curriculum enhanced with a conscious search for values touches the student at the very core, that inner place where decisions are made and goals are set, not only for this semester or this project, but for life.

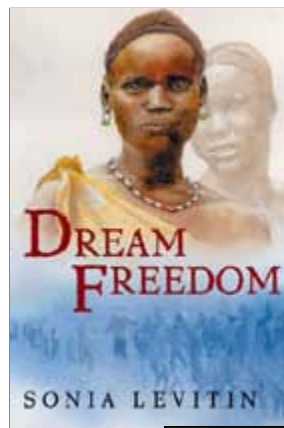
Where shall we find the heroes to model the good life, the rewarding life? Literature, to me, is the first stop. Why? Because in good fiction, the hero is memorable, the choices clear, the consequences immediately apparent. The fiction hero isn't perfect, but learns from mistakes, and often realizes that the original goal was not in line with reality, or some larger purpose. The hero's journey is presented in a nutshell, while our own journey can seem labored, impossibly frustrating, difficult, and perhaps worst, boring. We read in order to infuse the relative monotony of our lives with excitement, be it danger, love, sacrifice, deprivation or grand achieve-

ment. Strong needs and strong emotions propel the hero to action, enabling us to see clearly the pattern of decision-making and consequences. Every life is infused with pivotal moments, but often in our own journey we miss that moment, that opportunity to decide, to be heroic, to make a difference. By studying fiction heroes we learn how to pick out the pivotal moments that in our own lives, to use them in the best, most creative way. That, after all, is what a values training is all about: learning to see the signs of opportunity or, conversely, of danger, and deciding how to respond.

The *Finding Our Heroes and Ourselves* workshop is a process that was many years in development, and it includes many teaching tools and concepts that are not usually linked in a single presentation. A Teacher's Manual that accompanies the Power Point presentation models the precise way that the information and method will be used in the classroom. The *Heroes* method is not limited to the inclusive Writer's Workshop, or to providing tools for analyzing and understanding literature. The method embraces all aspects of curriculum, and of social encounter, because it defines and inspires critical thinking, good decision-making and personal responsibility.

Values cannot be taught by mere words, or adjuration. Students need concrete examples and models. They need to understand, simply, what works, what will move them to success, what consequences they face, what moments on their journey are the crucial ones where their destiny is molded.

The workshop is both inspirational and practical, using quotations from philosophers, scientists, poets and artists. It shows teachers how to use art, role-playing, self-evaluation, and group discussion to achieve a personal set of values and




a group consensus as to how we can best live together in a free society. For example, the workshop begins with a small group sharing of one's personal hero and the hero's traits. The discussion moves quickly to the fictional hero, to personal experiences, ultimately to the great society, so that the consequences of a single act, or a particular attitude are readily apparent. This technique inspires people to set their own higher goals, and often to take action. In short, the workshop techniques show students how to dissect and resolve the challenges posed in literature and mirrored in real life.

Literature provides us with abundant themes for discussion and learning for students of all ages.

- Shall I go or stay?
- Say yes or no?
- What is really important? Fame? Popularity? Power? Peace?

“... the workshop techniques show students how to dissect and resolve the challenges posed in literature and mirrored in real life.”

- What is your personal bottom line? When can you compromise? When should you hold firm?
- How do we achieve balance?

All these themes are addressed by heroes in literature. All are part of every person's daily life. A good workshop, I believe, provides more than technique or knowledge; it should inspire one to living a better life. 

Editor's Note: Author of more than a dozen novels, Sonia is currently writing script and lyrics for a musical based on her novel *The Return*. The link below will take you to the Spring 2002 issue in which Rabbi Leah Kroll outlines a middle school project she initiated based on Levitin's *Dream Freedom*, a novel about slavery in Sudan.

http://www.caisca.org/publications/faculty_spring_02.pdf



Ideas to try
for reducing
stress
in schools

Child or Trophy: Is the Pursuit of Excellence Getting out of Hand?

by Juliet Funt

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It is only a few months past the birth of my first child, and every aspect of my pregnancy is still crystal clear. The nausea, the aching hips, the sweet feeling of the baby pushing out on my taunt belly...and the first inkling of competition. That last one might seem odd until you are actually pregnant in Los Angeles in 2006 and realize that jockeying for your child's future status begins somewhere between the elastic pants and the heartburn. I took fish oil to promote brain development. I played my iPod to the belly to stimulate an appreciation for music. I read parenting books to make sure that my babe would have the *right* books, the *right* multi-sensory environment, and the *right* black and white mobiles. These are all benign and loving parts of pre-motherhood until you examine the sneakier motive: to stand out and be special - through him.

These days the race is on from birth and here is how it goes (cue "Flight of the Bumblebee"...). We take the baby out; suction, swab and swaddle. Then comes the APGAR score (the first standardized test). Once home the program moves to baby Einstein tapes, flashcards and sign language until it is time for the stairway of schools. Parents endure eight, or nine preschool interviews all knowing that the difference between Happy Turtle Daycare and the Choo Choo Children Center will set up their angel baby for a crucial



ascending
and ascending
until he stands upon
the diving board into the Land of the Ivy Leagues.

As an educational speaker and new mom, my professional view of this crazy competition was discordant with my instinctive desire for my child to have the *best* life possible. In an attempt to walk my talk, I remember that if I leave him to follow his path, Jake will become exactly who he is meant to be. Possibly he will be exceptional by exterior standards, and possibly he will be average. I hope he will have a huge heart, and a boundless capacity for joy, but even there I will have little control - and my pushing him in one direction or the other will only serve, in my opinion, to torture him and separate us.

School professionals are obliged to examine the institutional version of this issue. How does the pursuit



of “specialness” and excellence command our campuses? How much is enough, and what is the price paid? Though as a community we do manage to launch many kids into a life of maximizing their gifts, there is another subset of the student population whose stress and distress is more prominent than their conquests.

that hoping for a transformation in the parents alone is not enough. The best chance we have of reducing student tension is to focus on any way that we, individually or organizationally, may be adding to it. No matter how mindful a school is in striving towards the education of the whole child, all organizations have blind spots. Perhaps we are fueling the fire

first choice, the system itself needs questioning.

ACADEMICS

I was told that someday when I was older, I would understand why I took algebra. I have to make an admission. It still escapes me. With apologies to my math friends let us take a moment to acknowledge that academic learning is hugely important, but not everything. Our kids are also the servants of many masters when it comes to academics. Are we collaborating with other teachers, or perhaps employing a community calendar to prevent large assignments from hitting on the same day? Are we actually teaching to the multiple intelligences, or are we merely speaking the P.C. talk while pushing a traditional agenda?

ATHLETICS

Data shows that as little as 1% of seniors actually earn an athletic scholarship, with only a portion of that small sample getting a full ride. The pursuit of this thin slice has caused a number of negative side effects including overuse injuries, a fall off in multi-sport activities, and a hard decline in participation at older grades due to burnout. How do we control for a sane and balanced approach towards the thrill of victory on our campuses? Are we in open discussion about how club sports and school teams should share time and prioritization?

HOMEWORK

At the turn of the century, homework was outlawed in some areas because it was considered child labor. Now it is the big scapegoat. I can't tell you the number of parents who dismiss an entire hour of my stress management for families lecture by blaming their child's stress on too much homework. The solution

“As an educational speaker and new mom, my professional view of this **crazy competition** was discordant with my instinctive desire for my child to have the **best life** possible.”

And ohhh, it is so easy (and a bit gratifying) to blame those worked up, wrought out, desperately-in-need-of-a-hobby parents. From our perspective, we can easily see that each little stressed-out apple does not fall far from the Xanax-popping tree. As we watch them zip by with their caffeine to go and their Star Trek, Bluetooth, never-leave-the-phone earpieces, it seems that the focus of blame is squarely upon them.

The problem is, we have very little power over them. Wonderful parent education programs receive the attendance of a chess match. Qualified and loving counselors are not used to their full effect. It seems

in the costly quest for the exceptional.

THE COLLEGE CONVERSATION

Even in first grade we are thinking about college. Though far away, it looms and it's shadow influences everything. Of course, we should not villainize those who want to go to Harvard. There are some for whom that step is the end result of a sane progression. But is Tommy truly Harvard stock, or will he be driving himself into a massive backlash as soon as the pressure is off? Do you help parents of all ages look at the bigger picture? When kids with straight A's, 5 AP's, community service and 1600's are not getting their

is to get them talking. Do a survey of your families to find out how the homework load is sitting with them. Proactively arrange meeting times to strategize with those who have too much, or too little. Perhaps children should receive one to three (age appropriate) "My Dog Ate It" coupons per quarter, redeemable at the teacher's desk nearest them. (not kidding)


PARENTS

While we must refrain from laying every underage ulcer, or anxious heart at their doorsteps, parents *are* large contributors to the culture of pressure, and we must see how we can help them. The first step is to soften our hearts. Over time, that vexing 5% of high maintenance parents morphs in our minds until it becomes a majority. We begin to brace for impact in every interaction, and cannot be effective. This is a distortion. Most parents are a delight and the toughest are only passing down a distorted values system that they themselves are stewing in. Do we have a school counselor, and is that person reinforcing that more and more achieving can have a price? Are we creatively bribing them to attend educational events through raffles, giveaways, and the brave use of the word "mandatory?" Are we addressing the number of after school activities in each child's life and coaching families towards moderation?

THE DAY AFTER COLLEGE

It has been said that addiction is seeking the infinite where it cannot be found. There is an image that is sobering to even those completely high on the narcotic of accomplishment, and that is the day after college. There will come a time when the 16-year haul is over and all that is left is life. This day, surrounded by

boxes and a wide horizon of non-academic possibilities, they will be done. And although the pulse of ranking and hierarchy will continue through every element of modern life, more important may be their

ability to find pleasure in small things; their comfort in themselves, and their delight in the buffet of humanity with whom they will share the journey. 

7 Stress Reducing Ideas to Try Right Now at your School

1) Lengthen your lunch period. There is no way students can wait in line, eat, swallow and socialize that fast.

2) Add a Family Night once a quarter where there will be no homework of any kind and no tests the next day.

3) Implement the Harris Cooper homework standards; 10 minutes per child, per grade level, (i.e. 5th grade = 50 minutes per night) Cooper, the nation's leading expert on homework, went on to say that those amounts of homework should only be given 3-4 times per week for grades K-8. For high school the same equation applied up to 10 hours per week. At that point Cooper's studies showed that homework becomes counterproductive.¹

4) Take a piece of paper and answer this question- "If I had a magic wand, how would I change my campus today to reduce stress?" Pick one idea to implement by your next birthday.

5) Try some Sneaky Service. Offer children a philanthropic experience that they are not allowed to put on their resume. Use the experience to discuss the true joy and reciprocity of helping others.

6) Include some aspect of stopping, or silence in your classroom such as a moment of reflection, group mediation or just lying out on the lawn and doing nothing.

7) Re-institute naptime. (teachers, administrators and staff only)

1 Cooper, Harris, The Battle Over Homework (Corwin Press, 2001).



The active involvement of fathers in their children's lives (beyond sports) positively affects grades and attitudes about school.



Modern Dads: How Men's Lives Are Changing and Why It Matters To Educators

by John Badalament

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At a recent visit to a school in San Diego, I met two men who'd started a parent group called DADS (Dads And Dad Surrogates). As a school consultant who focuses on helping educators to better engage dads, and on teaching relationship skills to parents, faculty and students, I was curious about where these two busy men – Kyle, a 36 year old lawyer, and Peter, a doctor in his 50's – found the time and interest for DADS. They talked at length about their passion for their children, the excitement of starting something new at the school, and how little time there was for dads. But Kyle, the lawyer, summed it up best when he said, "I want to be as involved in my kids' lives as possible. I don't want to have to be *told* to do more...I *want* to do more."

These men exemplify a major cultural shift we are amidst here in America: the desire many men have to be more actively involved in their children's lives than their own fathers were with them – both at home and at school. Over the last 40 years women have reclaimed their assertiveness and power, entering the workforce in record numbers, becoming pilots, soldiers and CEO's, starting professional sports leagues, and running for every office in government. Consequently, this has led

to a radical shift in the lives of men. Most notable, are the emerging expectations (from women and men) for what it means to be a good father today.

Having worked with thousands of fathers and families in independent schools, I have tried to capture the most significant changes about fatherhood by creating what I call *The 5 Ideals of a Modern Dad*. These are the standards that I see more and more men attempting to hold themselves to:

- Understanding the Legacy They Carry
- Connecting Emotionally
- Showing Up Physically
- Engaging In Youth Culture
- Challenging Stereotypical Masculinity.

Similarly, these *5 Ideals* resonate with what I hear women wanting from their child's father.

So why does this matter to educators? If we want to best serve the families we work with, it's imperative that we:

- educate our parents about the significant benefits to students, their families and the school climate when more fathers/father-figures are involved at school beyond only sports;
- offer ways for dads to be involved at class, grade

and whole school levels on an ongoing basis;

- understand the changing culture of *modern fatherhood* and the implications for the families we serve now and in the future.

Schools that do address dads' needs are at an advantage now, but in the near future prospective families will come to expect them to.

When I do my parent workshop, *Modern Dads: How Men's Lives Are Changing And What It Means To Families*, I am often warned not to expect a big turnout. "Our dads are very, very busy..." is the constant refrain. With few exceptions, parent turnout is usually quite high, and fathers make up the majority of the audience. (Do I mind that some were "strongly encouraged" to attend? Absolutely not.) They show up and they stay for 1.5 - 2 hours, and almost all of them sign up for my newsletter *Modern Dads*. Dads are hungry to learn more about the impact they have on their families and discuss their experiences of fatherhood. Where else are dads given the opportunity to explore their role as a father? At work? Rare. When they go out with the guys? Even more rare. In this way, schools can and must play a central role in family life.

We know from research that when fathers are more involved in the school community beyond attending sporting events, volunteering at the school, attending class, grade and whole school level events, showing up for parent-teacher conferences and getting involved in the parent-teacher organization – children have been shown to get better grades, go further with their education and actually enjoy school more.¹ Because the topic of fatherhood has not historically been addressed in schools, many parents are unaware of the benefits a father's presence can have on their children, or more



“Dads are hungry to learn more about the **impact** they have on their families and discuss their **experiences** of fatherhood.”

specifically, their children's education. A natural and important venue for this education to occur is at school.

So, am I suggesting that 'if you build it, they (dads) will come?' For the most part, yes. But *how* you build it, and how you *maintain* it will make all the difference. The number one way to *initially* get more dads involved at school is to plan a father/father-figure event, or series of events. (I use the word *initially* because once a culture of father-involvement is developed, the approach will change.) This might be an evening talk about how dads affect child development, a reading program where dads are specifically invited to volunteer, a Friday night open-gym for dads and daughters/sons, or a pancake breakfast for dads.

Language is important. Notice my speaking topic, *Modern Dads: How Men's Lives Are Changing...* has the words *men* and *dad* in it. Like it or not, men are more likely to show up to a school event *initially* if they are specifically invited, and if it's clear that some of their interests and needs are being addressed. This means general flyers, or volunteer sign-ups are not always the most effective way to get dads involved. To many men, the word *parent* is still synonymous with *mother*.

Many schools already do a yearly father event – a one shot deal. The key to building something more durable and lasting involves using the pancake breakfast, or evening talk as a beginning, not an end. This is the place to find the core group of dads, the few guys that will do most of the work. At my talks, I ask explicitly for a few men who are interested in getting more dads involved to speak that evening with the parent association, or school representative.

This core group of dads may be



2 or 3 in size, but can accomplish a great deal. Dads need to be invited to participate *by other dads*. Many dads have said they would be more likely to volunteer if they knew other men would be there.

The first thing a core group of dads should do is to take a *father/father-figure interest survey*. (I have different versions.) The survey is a great publicity generator (it goes out to all families), and it yields very useful information: what skills men have, times they are available, and ways they would like to be involved. This should be done in conjunction with an interested faculty member, or under the aegis of the parent association. (I have heard of rogue dads groups that didn't work out so well!) With this information, the core group can determine a meeting structure – I recommend short monthly or bi-monthly open meetings – as well as plan a couple of easy events. One major survey of dads in schools found that men like activities that are concrete, achievable, and have clear expectations; a fix-it day at the school, a camping trip, a golf tournament, etc.²

I work with schools and dads groups to make sure that they balance these kind of events with education and more meaningful activities (i.e., communication skills for dads and sons/daughters). It is far too easy for dad's groups to devolve into de facto networking-only events for men. This is where thoughtfulness, timing and training come in. It is also important that schools don't rush into increasing father involvement. Many schools and dad's groups get overly ambitious and try to do too much, then become disappointed and quit when attendance isn't high. A slow build is essential to the group's success.


We are in a time of transition; there are men like Kyle and Peter

who started the DADS group in San Diego, and there are others who are no less excited, but won't take the initiative. While there is more societal permission for men to push strollers or change diapers at a professional football stadium, dads still need an invitation to be more involved at school. It is, however, a two-way street; dads need to get over their fear of schools being as one dad described, "feminine environments." There is some truth to this, especially in elementary schools simply given the predominance of female teachers, but as I say to dads, it is not an excuse for low involvement; nor is being "too busy." Plenty of single working moms, and increasingly more single dads, have managed to stay involved in schools while keeping up with the demands of a job.

With that said, as the next generation of parents' children reach school age, educators will likely encounter more dads who are used to being actively involved in their children's lives, working hard and expecting the school to be amenable to their ideas and involvement. So, it's in the school's best interest to understand what these families need. Will moms have trouble with what some see as men's encroachment on their "domain"? Perhaps. Some mothers I've talked to do feel threatened, especially those who aren't in the working world, and take their children's education as seriously as a job. However, most mothers welcome men's increased involvement and very much want the community of fathers and father-figures to play an active role at school.

I believe that one reason for the increasing achievement gap between boys and girls is related, in part, to the lack of men showing up at school. When dads attend only sporting events, a clear message is

sent to children, boys especially, about what matters most. If, on the other hand, children see dads reading in class, volunteering at school events, attending parent nights, or participating in a dad's club, they get the message that men value academics, and take parenting seriously. Even though many dads help with homework in the evenings, it is simply not the same as physically showing up at the school.

Schools have a vested interest in learning how to best serve the modern dads in their communities. Children do better, fathers feel more included and useful, families in general feel more balanced, and the school gains access to many previously unknown resources. I've known groups like DADS in San Diego, for example, to take on projects in fundraising, physical plant issues, career development, violence prevention, event staffing, and gender balance in academic achievement. For too long, schools have expected very little from fathers, so now is the time to tap into the emerging culture of modern fatherhood. 

Editor's note: John Badalament, Ed.M. was associated with the Drew School in its formative years. His documentary film, *All Men Are Sons: Exploring the Legacy of Fatherhood*, aired nationally on PBS. John is a graduate of Harvard's Graduate School of Education who lectures internationally. Currently he is working on a film about fathers and daughters and a book about *Modern Dads*. Visit John's website for more information and to sign up for, *Modern Dads*, a bi-monthly newsletter with articles, interviews with experts and cutting-edge resources for parents and educators.. www.johnbadalament.com

¹Nord, C.W. and J. West. *Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools by Family Type and Resident Status*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001

²"Dads Make A Difference," retrieved from www.three4me.com

What's New and What's Up in Physical Education?

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So what's new you ask? The California Physical Education Content Standards were adopted in January 2005 and schools across the state are currently attending workshops on the roll-outs. In collaboration with California Association of Health Physical Education Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD), California Subject Matter Physical Education – Health Projects, and the California Department of Education, these workshops assist educators with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the new paradigm shift in physical education.

As many educators know, standards are not new for education. However, in physical education they are. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, the standards based education momentum in the 1980's, and the 2000 act of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), these content standards give physical education the same opportunity as other academic areas in closing the achievement gap. As demonstrated in others areas of learning, we know it will take some time and much effort to have all parties educated and involved with these content standards.

In 2002, AB1793 mandated the Board of Education must adopt Model Content Standards for Physical Education. In 2004, superintendent of education, Jack O'Connell, appointed 19 educators to the position of writing these content standards. In writing these content standards, the committee focused on a vital question, "What skills and knowledge should a physically educated graduate from California possess?" Five overarching standards for grades kindergarten to eighth grade were delivered and three for high school. These five over arching content standards for kindergarten to eighth grade are as follows.

1. Demonstrate motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of movement concepts, principles, and strategies as they apply to learning and performance of physical activities.
3. Assess and maintain a level of physical fitness to improve health and performance.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of physical fitness concepts, principles, and strategies to improve health and performance
5. Demonstrate and utilize knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles, and strategies as applied to learning and performance of physical activity.

The three overarching content standards for high school are as follows.

1. Demonstrate knowledge and competency in motor skills, movement patterns and strategies needed to perform a variety of physical activities.
2. Achieve a level of physical fitness for health and performance while demonstrating knowledge of fitness concepts, principles, and strategies.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles, and strategies as they apply to learning and performance of physical activity.

For physical educators, the paradigm shift begins with the traditional practices of instructional planning moving into a standards based instructional planning sequence.

- Selecting a topic from the curriculum into **selecting a standard from among those students need to know**
- Designing instructional activities into **creating performance standards and design assessments**
- Designing and giving an assessment into **deciding what learning opportunities students will need to learn those things**
- Giving a grade or feedback into **differentiating instruction if necessary**
- Moving onto a new topic into **using data from assessment to give feedback, re-teach, or move to next level**

So what's up for physical educators to do... ? The first thing is to go online and get a free copy of the California Physical Education Content Standards. Go to www.CAHPERD.org, and download the standards. Second, become a member of CAHPERD, and sign up for a training level. There are five levels of roll-outs. There are two levels being offered this summer. Sign up by contacting CAHPERD. The five levels are:

Level 1: revealing the standards... unpacking

Level 2: performance standards

Level 3: assessment tools and data analysis

Level 4: designing the learning experience

Level 5: bringing it all together (grading,

communicating plans, yearly plans, and more

Stay tuned for 2006 -2007... mandated Fitnessgram

Scores.