

Three Rs to Consider (www.effectiveteachingpd.com)

The new school year often brings both excitement and anxiety for students, families and educators as we embark on another journey of learning about the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic. As an educator, remember what it was about school that made you excited about learning and incorporate those ideas into your own instruction. Here are a few more Rs to consider to shake things up and start off right.

Relationships

Dr. Rita Pearson states in her **Ted Talk**, "**Kids don't learn from people they don't like.**" I have found this to be very true.

If you are wondering what type of "business" educators are in, we are in the RELATIONSHIP and SERVICE business.

In real estate it's all about location, location, location. In education, it's relationships, relationships, relationships.

Educators often ask me what is the fastest and most effective way to increase student achievement? The answer is...build positive relationships with them.

Students who feel valued and have a positive connection with their teachers perform better because kids strive to please those they admire and respect, thereby putting more effort into their assignments. They also are not afraid to seek input and help from those who provide them positive support and guidance, an important component in being successful.

In addition, educators are in the SERVICE business. In order to be successful, we must find out what our "clients" need and then strategically meet their needs.

Studies show that our students (clients) need positive interaction, engagement, accountability for learning, continual feedback, clear expectations, and opportunities for revision. So these should be part of the "service" we provide.

A colleague once made an important clarification for me. She said, "Students do not work for us, we work for them."

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Many educators lack this mindset; therefore they misunderstand what our purpose is...to build relationships and serve student needs.

Reflect

Much research has documented the benefit of setting goals and reflecting on what went well and what needs improvement.

Consider establishing goals regarding your health, your learning needs and your student achievement levels; reflect often on accomplishments and areas for improvement.

For example, when I first started teaching, I was exhausted and overwhelmed at times by the demands of the profession. Therefore, I set a goal of exercising 4 mornings per week at 5am to get my brain and body ready for the energy required (and stresses encountered) in this profession. I set that goal nearly 20 years ago and I still adhere to it.

The oxygenated blood flow to the brain (a result of exercise) is extremely helpful in critical thinking, stress management, emotional regulation, increased neural connections, and maintaining a sense of control in our often hectic lives.

Exercise strengthens me to be a better teacher and colleague.

Professionally, I endeavor to study a few educational books per semester which has tremendously enhanced my pedagogy and expertise.

A few to consider are:

Teach Like a Pirate (Burgess)

Mindset (Dweck)

Digital Leadership (Sheninger)

Research-Based Strategies to Ignite Student Learning (Willis)

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Game Changers~7 Instructional Practices that Catapult Student Achievement (my latest book)

I reflect on what I learned and put into practice those ideas I find helpful to my students. As I reached my reading goals and assessed my students' needs, my instruction changed over the course of the years, as it should.

In my classroom each year, I would look at the proficiency levels of the students coming to me and I would set a goal of increasing their proficiency levels 20-30% by doing certain things over the course of the year.

I might include more *Timed Readings* and writings, pre, during, and post strategies, PBL, or explicit vocabulary instruction. Again, adjusting my practices after reflecting on my students' needs.

I would also incorporate the same goal-setting and reflection process with my students. I would share with them their strengths and areas for improvement based on previous data from assessments and grades. Then students would set their goals and strategies for improvement.

Guess what? It worked. Simply raising students' awareness of their performance and giving them a toolkit of strategies for improvement, did increase their achievement.

Setting goals and reflecting on our strengths and areas for improvement are powerful components to increasing our success.

Retakes

When I first started teaching, I never allowed students to redo an assignment or test because I thought that made the class too easy and students wouldn't take it seriously. When discussing the topic with a colleague, he told me that he didn't allow retakes as he was preparing kids for the "real world" in which there are no retakes. At the time and with my limited experience in working with students, his sentiment sounded reasonable.

However, after working with students for years, I noticed that about 10-20% of my students weren't ready to demonstrate proficiency on an assignment or test the day it was given. They simply hadn't developed enough understanding (neural connections) with the content to be successful.

When I allowed students a few extra days or weeks to practice the content and redo an assignment or test, they would have much higher levels of mastery simply because they had more time to learn and connect with the content. In other words, they were afforded the luxury of turning the light bulb on!

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In order to qualify for a retake, a student might need to complete a few extra practice assignments or watch a review video in order to have more time practicing the content.

The retake quiz or assignment may look a little different than the original and that's OK. You also might not allow re-dos for ALL assignments, just the major ones that test for essential skill development, and that's OK too.

So if you think you are preparing kids for the "real world" by not allowing retakes, consider this, all major tests: driving tests, real estate license tests, the bar exam, contractor licensing, medical boards, etc., all allow retakes.

Perhaps a more important life lesson is to teach kids to learn from their mistakes and fix them in order to not make the same mistake--that is what retakes allow.

If our goal as educators is to help our students develop mastery in our content area, then we should consider all ways in which to permit students to demonstrate it, including retakes.

I hope your year is full of great relationships, reflection and retakes. I encourage you to try something new and reflect on the process as you continue to find more ways to connect kids to learning and success.