

PRE/POST WORKSHOP READING

MY LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM – QUESTIONING CREATIVELY FOR MYSELF

“EXCHANGING GIFTS THROUGH LIFE-SKILL GAMES, COMBINED WITH OTHER INVESTIGATIVE, INTERACTIVE, DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING DESIGNED TO MEET BOYS’ NEEDS.”

A.B.BLACKHURST JUNE 2008

INTRODUCTION

1) I daily ask myself about methods of learning, how to motivate or help particular children and what practical uses for creative expression I may implement.

I wonder about desirable bounds to pupils’ age-appropriate experiences, including matters of lateral and vertical academic extension and support.

(The answers I provide myself keep changing, in some way - if not as often on a philosophical level, regularly in the concrete form of grass-roots practical application and outcomes. Sometimes, for a while, I allow the way I would like to act on my chosen answers to be limited by the attitudes of other teachers or a perceived lack of opportunity or time. In the end, however, I shake myself out of such negativity and do act on what I believe is in the best interests of my pupils.)

2) I put questions to my pupils all day long.

(They, in turn, keep changing my idea of the best possible responses.)

3) I live with uncertainty and change, and ask about how it affects those with whom I work.

(Our circumstances in South Africa affect our daily lives.)

4) I ask myself how to engineer a birthday, Christmas or some other dissimilar celebration in my classroom almost every day.

(When I was a child, each boy or girl at a party took home a material memento. I just love to hear our moments of celebration are being discussed in cars and dining rooms each day.)

THE PRE-SCHOOL, MORNING RITUAL

I arrive in my school rooms shortly after 06h00.

1) What do I think of pupil X?

(I first present the class PC with a new screen-saver, quickly composed on the Promethean Interactive Board using a classroom digital photograph of pupil X. That collage portrays my latest interpretation of that lad; his life and/or dreams; or even my dreams for him, often later hotly debated. This is my first gift for them of the day.)

2) What piece of work do I have to add to the display boards?

(Any creativity week contributions?)

3) Should anything be taken down, having served its purpose?

4) What different, engaging "gift" opportunity/event can I include in each one-hour teaching session?

5) Which worked yesterday and should be repeated another time?

(The day's most important "gift" to someone is seldom planned, thank goodness! We all love surprises!)

6) Who, thankfully, was the first to alter my automatic pilot setting for the proposed outcomes and route the previous day? How, why and with what outcome? How did I adapt? Should it affect my proposed learning schedule for this day? Should I chat to him or anyone else before we start the day, if there was a precedent that was not good or an exceptionally valuable one?

(Every pupil experiences moments when he believes he should provide some evidence of "captaincy skills". I would worry, if that were not the case.)

7) To which recent moments of pupil inspiration should I refer during the course of the morning?

(Pupils set standards for others and themselves by their example.)

I photostat material, read my emails and the newspaper headings, listen to a radio news broadcast and, at 07H30, am off to chat to colleagues and attend the school assembly.

THE CLASS

1) What makes any lad curious to learn at school?

Should I rather be asking about why he does everything else – why he loves spending time with his father and mother, playing games on his own or with friends, or eating pizza?

Does he feel he learns more useful skills and knowledge at home or elsewhere?

Would these answers always be different to the one about being curious to learn at school?

2) What is the balance, in his life outside of school, between what he wants to do, what he ought to do willingly and what actually transpires?

Are there opportunities at school to be able to shape/alter the parameters of one's own work assignment, at least every so often, with due consideration for other factors?

How is it that, in my experience, the engaged student comes up with more ideas to implement, for the curriculum programme, even when a classroom game/schedule is already making extra academic demands?

When does learning become a habit and how may I encourage the process?

How different is this class from any other?

How different are the parents from any other group?

3) How or why does each pupil, whose records officially designate him as a challenge, actually challenge?

How should he be challenged?

Aren't Christmas trees, religious festivals and birthday cakes useful as community connectors and results- or self-regulation-enhancers? Should Santa Claus have sole rights? Do we not have things to celebrate every day?

4) Just what does a "rainbow" or sunrise promise – that the world will one day again be the same as it used to be, that today is just another day for each of us?

What did each member of Noah's menagerie celebrate?

Should life be better than yesterday for each pupil and teacher?

How shall we learn from it and one another to handle today and tomorrow differently?

5) Do I set more goals for the pupils than they set themselves?

Do I set more goals for the pupils than I set myself?

How often do pupils set me goals?

6) Do my expectations for each day's classroom activities match those of my pupils?

Do I play a role in creating theirs? What else may?

7) Has anyone started imagining him/herself sitting in an own classroom, while reading this?

Do my pupils ever seriously imagine what they would do in my position?

THE LEARNING SESSION

1) Should I operate the CPS or Board today or should one of the less engaged pupils?

2) Once the introduction is complete and learning is under way, for whom should I be a switch to be activated on demand, for whom should I not function at all and for whom should I not wait before intervening?

3) Are technological tools likely to provide better learning assistance than the pupils' peers?

Are they able to draw on both as well as the teacher?

What else is around to help the process?

4) Are technological tools likely to provide better learning assistance than the pupils' peers? Are they able to draw on both as well as the teacher or someone else? What else is around to help the process?

5) Are there different learning and teaching styles that I forget each week? Did I hear someone say, "Sir, may we / I ...?" Or was I too busy watching model building; guiding the photographer; or like Nero, playing around the walls of the town; just wondering why; noting or listening to something; reading a pupil newspaper article; responding to a design tender; checking a bank audit and municipal records; or rating a capitalist scheme with a pupil? Who has been actively learning/engaged? Just some of them and I?

6) In a formal, table/desk bound session, should I wait for a pupil to move or obviously think about something else, before I ask him to do both those things?

When should I bring in aspects of the game, if something unrelated or a more formal traditional classroom practice is being completed?

Is the work presently engaging each lad, whatever his ADHD rating?

7) When or how should one ask a pupil just what or who they are or would like to be one day?

Does the pupil really have a choice or know his own mind?

What options does he have as to how he experiences life today, while at school, bearing related questions in mind?

Who, in his world, takes the time and makes the effort to regularly simulate or explain some aspect of life, whatever that is? Who in his world offers him opportunities to engage on his own or equal terms?

As he is someone who is different, is going somewhere and making choices, are there related benefits to being in my classroom? (Did someone mention microcosms, looking forward and green issues?)

8) Are all my pupils certified learners and winners? How is that?
Does anyone in this lesson deserve a bonus? Why?

9) Where are the bounds of my classroom and syllabus and how flexible should they all be?

How does what happens in my classroom, during formal lesson times and after hours, impact on the efforts of the other teachers and pupils?

10) I play "life-skill" games every day, some of which last up to thirteen weeks. Or a life-time?

Could I have asked everything I have of pupils, this term, without the games we play and the slant I put on all activities?

Would each pupil have offered and delivered as many gifts?

Might they have offered more, if more narrowly focused?

THE END OF THE DAY – PREPARATION TIME

1) How did I gift the lads or whomever?
How did the lads gift me?

2) Should one talk to oneself (silently, of course) as much as I do? Given the option, would I listen to me more than I listen to pupils?

3) Did I make sure today that they did not have to listen to me for long? Did they learn by doing, experimenting, failing (Ha! Ha!) temporarily, thinking, creating and having fun or enjoying a sense of satisfaction, at least?

4) Was the assessment unnerving for anyone. Why? Did I boob in not foreseeing that possibility? Has the pupil more to learn from the event than I?

5) Did I encounter another example of best practice to store in the resource system or show staff today?

How was the class's/pupil's work better or worse than previously/previous classes?

6) How was today better, new, surprising and motivational for me?

7) How best should I now prepare for tomorrow?

MY WORLD AS A TEACHER-LEARNER.

1) Given every wonderful, interesting, challenging day, at school and away, could I ever argue against my fortunate circumstances that enable me to say “doceo ergo sum”?

(I work in a wonderful micro-environment, largely of my own making. My headmaster is a golden facilitator who encourages me to play to my strengths, input my own ideas and to improve, or offer more, in other areas!)

2) When did I last ask my pupils, colleagues and principal what they think I do?
Should I?

3) Is role-playing really such fun, so open to creative and innovative interpretation and as useful as the kids and I tell me?

4) How inspired and inspiring do I hope I am and, at the end of the day, has anyone else seen any of those qualities in me and how might that affect them?

