

AV Reading

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The Intensified School Day

“Those who can see the invisible, can do the impossible.”
--Taken off the wall in Room 130

Reading News:

- Literacy Planning Committee: Come join our professional learning community where we discuss literacy, teaching and community once a month. We meet on the first Wednesday of every month in Room 132 from 2:30-3:00. Feel free to join us.

-Using Google Docs: I have been using Google Docs with my classes for the last few years. If you are interested in learning how I do this and ways that you might be able to use them as well, come visit me.

-Building a Project Gallery in Moodle: As I offer more and more digital project options, I have begun to create “project galleries” within Moodle. They are a fun and easy way to have students share and display their work. See me if you would like to see one or learn about how I set them up.

-I am Number Four: If you are looking for a fun, fast and action packed young adult novel to read, check out Pitticus Lore’s *I am Number Four*. The movie is coming out soon as well.

It is easy to document how intensified the school day of a teacher has become. It is also easy to document the impact of that intensification on the performance of those teachers. It isn’t as easy to convince people, outside of the classroom, about the need to improve these conditions. For this month’s newsletter I would like to present the general argument that the demands of today’s classroom can not be met as long as we continue to build up the loads of teachers, and until we address this underlying problem, the larger problems of education are more likely to only get worse.

Professor Michael Apple from the University of Wisconsin, has written a considerable amount on the topic of the intensified school day. He explains that we have most visibly seen an intensification to the school day through a number of telltale symptoms, that range from the trivial to the more complex. He discusses everything from “no time being allowed to go to the bathroom, have a cup of coffee or relax, to having a total absence of time to keep up with one’s field.” He explains that this process ultimately takes a toll on the quality, not the quantity of the service provided. “While traditional human service professionals have equated doing good work with the interests of their clients or students, intensification tends to contradict the traditional interest in work well done, in both a

quality product and process.”

Unfortunately, the current trend in education is to look for solutions that emphasize what the teacher does, and not the conditions in which they are asked to teach. In other words, a great deal of time and attention has been given to “what works,” and to “best practices,” and to the technical aspects of what the teacher does (or does not) do. Schools and systems look for the answers to their biggest problems by turning to research and asking, “What do good teachers do? What are the technical answers to creating good teachers?” Mary M. Kennedy, in the November issue of *Educational Researcher*, writes that we have overemphasized the “what works” of teacher performance and overlooked the situational factors that might have a strong impact on the quality of what teachers do. She explains, “It is time to look beyond the teacher to the teaching situation itself: the school, the classroom, the teacher’s schedule, and the teacher’s resources.”

Donald Schon, who actually wrote about the field of architecture and design addressed this issue years ago. He suggested that the demands of today’s society require ways of thinking about the world-- and our classrooms-- that we have never attempted. He implores professionals to part take in regular and ongoing reflection by setting aside time

Intensification continues on 2.

Intensification Continued from 1.

every day to process, evaluate, and plan.

Amidst all of the initiatives and mandates that we have been handed, amidst the demands of growing class rosters, and increased responsibilities, we have an added obligation to work for the conditions of our schools and classrooms. And we can do so on two levels. First, on a personal level, we can prioritize time in the day for reflection and thinking. It can take the form of writing, discussion, or reading-- preferably reading within our fields that will ultimately challenge us to re-think, re-consider, and to grow. Ultimately, this will mean sacrificing something else, simply adding more to the daily schedule does not work. In fact, that mentality ultimately caused the problem from the start. Second, we need to be more vocal advocates for creating healthy working conditions. It means that we are thoughtful about what we add to our list of responsibilities, and we are vocal when things are added to our lists for us.

Years ago, I had a guest speaker for my Beatniks, Hippies, and Punks class (a class which was later re-named Counter Cultures). The speaker talked about the counter culture of the 60s, but he was also a recovering addict and a teacher at a Minneapolis high school. He told the class that as part of his recovery, he ended every school day by writing himself a letter, putting it in an envelope, sealing it, and placing it on his desk. The next morning, he would open the envelope, read it, and pick-up where he left off, hopefully avoiding the mistakes from the day before. Being a reflective professional is not easy in this climate. But the need is greater than ever as our days become more filled and the demands placed upon us become more intensified.

Textbook Reading Tip: Ending the Guessing Game

Reading researchers have documented the importance of establishing a purpose while reading. However, when it comes to textbooks, we might not always tell our students what the purpose might be. Taking a few moments before the reading is assigned to tell students what they should focus on takes away the guessing game for your students. If done correctly, they no longer have to attempt to guess what you want them to find, but rather they can be on the look out for it.

Setting Purpose

Remind students:

- Before sitting down to read, a good reader will think about their purpose in reading the text.
- As they read, they should come back to their purpose a few times to check their understanding.
- After they read, they must consider if they met their purpose. (In other words, did you get the information you had wanted to?)

As a teacher:

- Preview the reading for your students. Sometimes a “book walk” works best. A book walk is where you page through the reading with your students drawing their attention to things you want them to notice.
- Give them a half sheet with the stated purpose explicitly written on the top. This differs from guided (textbook manufactured) questions. It is a more personalized message to your students that says, “Here is what I want you to prioritize and look for as you read.” This isn’t easy, because we want them to understand and learn it all, but stick to the “big ideas” that you want them to take from the reading.