

AV Reading

“In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many you get through, but rather how many of them get through to you.”

-- Mortimer J. Adler

Reading News:

--Join the Literacy Planning Committee: Wednesday, January 4th and Wednesday February 1st, 2:30-3:00 in Room 132.

--MRA Winter Symposium: The Minnesota Reading Association will be hosting an event on Native American / American Indian perspectives and resources. The new English Language Arts Standards require English classes to use texts by Minnesota American Indians. Find out more about the symposium at mnreading.org.

--Hot Non-Fiction

Reads: If you are not much of a reader, or perhaps you have a taste for non-fiction, I would recommend one or all of the following. Each in it's own right, offers a very informative and interesting perspective on a given subject: *Born to Run, The Tiger, Too Far From Home, Moneyball*.

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Lessons of *Moneyball* for the Classroom

Michael Lewis' recent book-turned-movie titled *Moneyball* is the story of how Billy Beane of the Oakland Athletics more-or-less defied conventional baseball reasoning to maximize the potential of some highly undervalued players. Though I believe that Michael Lewis over exaggerates both the brilliance of Beane and the ignorance of MLB, he does offer us some interesting approaches that could be easily applied to the way we assign, collect, and evaluate homework.

Beane's philosophy had essentially three seemingly contradictory foundations. First, you couldn't trust what you were seeing on the field. He believed that when scouting and recruiting players, scouts were often fooled by things that don't really matter when it comes to baseball, like how a player looks or appears to behave. Second, you couldn't trust the numbers and statistics currently employed by baseball teams. Certain statistics like errors, batting average, and Runs Batted In (RBIs) were not accurate (or precise) measurements of a player's worth or ability because these numbers don't really capture the complex "language" of what is happening on the field. Third, you could trust

certain numbers that seemed to be more precise and indicative of a player's worth. With the help of a Harvard educated economist, he began to put greater weight on statistics like on-base percentage and slugging percentage. He even utilized statistics that measured a player's defensive worth against his offensive worth. In defying the conventional notions, Beane has been able to acquire talented players normally overlooked by teams. He found gold where others merely saw lead.

I think there is a good take-away here for educators. First, you can't always trust what you see on the surface within the classroom. As mentioned previously, I think we are sometimes disadvantaged by our experience in that we assume that because students struggled with homework or lessons in the past for one reason, then that must still be the case today. Second, some of the numbers we use to evaluate students do not always accurately reflect what they have or have not learned. Test scores are often incomplete tools in demonstrating student growth and learning. And project or homework points can sometimes inflate scores to reflect

greater understanding than what is reality. Third, certain numbers might be more precise and meaningful. In the examples of Beane and his economist, they seem to shun some of the traditional measurements of success and failure on the field because they allowed too much room for either subjective judgment (giving an error to a player) or they depended too much on other variables or events.

Here are some potential tools that one could apply. Compare the amount of time and effort you put into homework completion in class to the completion rates of students. Compare the number of resources available to students against their completion rates. Examine completion rates against test performance to find if there is a link between doing the homework and how they do on tests. Survey students and parents to find what they believe to be are the obstacles to homework completion.

Like Beane, the challenge is to re-vision our classroom. It is to de-emphasize the data and numbers that often distract us and search for information that can allow us to more accurately diagnose and treat the problems within our lessons and classrooms. Doing so brings about innovation and change and allows us to see gold where others only see lead.

The Brochure: An Enticing Alternative to the PPT

Last spring, Ethan Bleifuss shared a project that his classes had recently completed. They were these fantastic looking digital displays that students had created on their own. I discovered that they had used a brochure template (available both in Microsoft Word or in Pages). The templates are user friendly and once students have a little training on replacing text and images, they become an enticing alternative to powerpoint presentations.

Some units lend themselves to brochures then others. They work well on units where a good amount of facts and information are necessary. They can also be good for a project option that requires persuasion or marketing. It can also be noted that brochures lend themselves to rampant copy and pasting from the internet. But there are steps you can take to reduce / prevent this. For starters, you can give them the facts or details you want them to include, or you can turn it into an "ISearch" where they must put everything in first person. Since most of the material on the Internet is not in first person, then this insures that at the very least they had to re-write it as such.

Here are some helpful hints on using the Brochures as a form of assessment:

1. Have samples to show students.
2. Give them specific guidelines for what you want on each panel of the brochure.
3. Have students "storyboard" their brochure before doing a draft.
4. Have students submit the final project to you digitally (class servers can be set up where they save it to a "shared" location.)