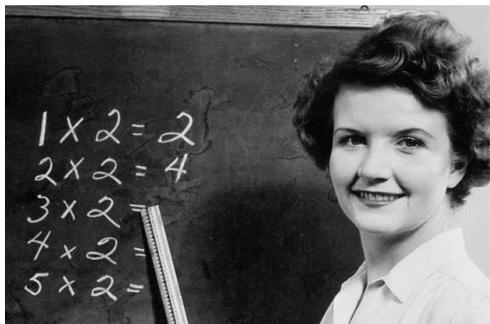


Teach it Twice: A tip for primary teachers and principals



Sean David Burke _____

Every teacher knows that you can't teach something just once. Material needs to be taught, reiterated, reviewed, tested and often taught again. The most essential lessons learnt at school will all probably need to be taught many times, and at least twice.

This is especially true in primary (elementary) schools, where children are often dreamy and perhaps not so ready to take the lesson in fully the first time around.

When adults cast their minds back to their own primary schooling, they remember the events or experiences that were unusual, exciting or troublesome. The playground altercations, camps, excursions, plays, sports meetings, exciting stories and even the daily round of the canteen are all so much more memorable than any drab lessons on factors, decimals, nouns, tense or spelling.

Peak events are memorable, both because of the exciting activities they involved and also for the way in which relationships were played out within them. Children at school are vitally interested in their relationships with each other, and with their teachers. Children follow their hearts. That is how it is.

Educator Emmanuel Pariser, reflecting on his teaching in the 1970s, stated;

"...slowly we began to understand the primary emphasis which is at the heart of our learning environment - we want all members of our school community to develop healthy, reciprocal relationships which are embedded with trust, intimacy, curiosity, nurturance..."

Knowing this, the development of relationship should be front and centre of every school curriculum and should determine the way schools are organised and lessons scheduled.

The development of relationship, however, requires time. At present, most schools operate as if the development of the teacher/student relationship can occur sufficiently within a one year period. Normally, teachers teach each class for one single year and then never teach that class again. There are some exceptions, such as the Waldorf schools and mixed age groups in Montessori and traditional small rural schools, where students often stay with the same teacher or group of teachers for a number of years, and sometimes for their whole primary schooling.

Perhaps the development of useful and productive relationships should not be constrained by a one year time limit in any school, whether alternative or mainstream.

Imagine a teacher who had taught a class once before, say in grade one, and then later had the opportunity to teach the group again, say in class 5. She will be able to renew relationships with the students and their families. She will be able to see, first hand, the progress each student has made and also notice characteristic behaviours, positive and negative, which persist. She will be able to bring the same content that she covered with the students years earlier, in a new and age-appropriate way, and the class will then experience the lesson in a deeper sense and from a new perspective. The gap between the first and subsequent year will be bridged, allowing the students to feel a sense of continuity.

In most schools, of course, teachers do not do their own scheduling. It is up to the administration staff, principals and deputies, to arrange the allocation of teachers in such a way as to maximise the benefits of the further nurturing of relationship.

If this suggestion is a novel idea in a particular school's culture, it could be taken on as an experiment and a few teachers asked to volunteer for a year and report back to their colleagues on the challenges and benefits they experience.

Everything needs to be taught at least twice. The teacher/student relationship is central to learning. Every teacher and every class can be given the opportunity to share their learning journeys more than once.

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Ref: Pariser, E. (1999) Relational Education at
http://www.spinninglobe.net/spinninglobe_html/emsreled.htm

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