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THE NEW

no 23 - October 2015



To embrace, encourage, and empower through a network of Christian educators.

No Child Left Inside- By Becky Ramsey, Christian School Representative



Our school is starting something different that has had positive results in the classroom as well as good feedback from parents. It is a program we are calling "No Child Left Inside."

We are striving to work on developing projects within our curriculum units that get our students outside, taking part in hands-on learning activities coupled with settings on our wide-open school campus or farther away. These settings have stimulated a renewed interest in the lesson content for our students.

This challenge has also helped our teachers to work outside of the box of typical "classroom" agendas and become more creative in their lesson planning. This lesson input has also forced veteran teachers not to be satisfied with the status quo or "what has always worked." They have searched for new and inventive ideas that excite their students. Sometimes it is easy for a teacher to fall back on last year's scheduled plans because they worked for us last time. Teachers may be tempted to use the same plans whether or not they are working for this year's students. We may tweak a lesson here or there but never really overhaul it to the point of finding a new location and allowing the learning to become totally student-focused rather than teacher-centered.



Project learning usually takes the learning focus out of the hands of the teacher and puts it in the control of the students, a condition which can be very scary for ANY teacher. Giving up the control to another person, let alone to his or her pupils, sounds like anarchy to a seasoned teacher. But should anyone try such a project, the student response will be reward enough! Plus, the outside air can be energizing enough to give the teacher a desire to keep teaching.



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The Wonders of Fall - By Melodee Simmons Homeschool Representative



Are you as ready for autumn as I am? It's been a long, hot summer. We've had our first couple of days of cooler weather (that means upper 70's, low 80's where I live), and we are loving it. The children are energized, and the teachers seem to have renewed energy.

Enjoy this time with the children. Go outside, look for leaves that have changed their color. Tell the children how God planned for the leaves to change colors and fall to the ground. Look for acorns, pinecones and other seed-bearing pods. My mimosa tree is full of seed pods. Tell the children about God's plan for renewal and rebirth. It is fun to save some seeds and see if they will sprout in the spring.

When my oldest son, Matthew, was in kindergarten many years ago, his teacher taught the students about "Signs of Fall." The children had to bring in things they found that were signs of autumn. We had a good time looking for and finding fall items. Every year after, we would see colored leaves, pinecones on the ground, or the large flocks of birds that come here to spend the winter. Then one of us would point and say, "signs of fall."

Have your children collect fall items that they find. Set up a display for the children to examine everything. They can discover the texture, smell, color, size and weight of each object. Give them magnifying glasses to examine the items closely. Teach the students new words to describe what they are discovering. One of the most fun things to do in the fall is to let the children run through the fallen leaves. The fresh air, the sound of air, the sound of the crackling leaves, and the children's laughter is wonderful.

Another fun thing to do is to let the children clean out the inside of pumpkins. Make sure to have a camera ready to catch those expressions of the first time the children stick their hand inside the pumpkin and feel what is in there. Then serve the children pumpkin pie or pumpkin bread so they can taste the pumpkin.

Talk about apples that are harvested in the fall. Make apple sauce in a crock-pot, or have apples for snack. Bring in Indian corn. After the children have examined it, lay the corn in a shallow bowl with water about half way up the corn. Watch the corn sprout and grow. God has given us so many things to see and explore at this time of the year. Use this time to introduce the children to the wonders of God's world.

*Uprooted: One Girl's Story of Life as a Refugee**

[Editor's Note: There has been much information in the news lately about refugees fleeing Syria. This is the story of a girl whose family had to flee from another country because of their Christian faith.]

Around the world, millions of refugees have been forced to flee their homes to seek safety in another country. Because of persecution, war, violence, or disasters, the refugees were left with no other options. Almost half of those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes are children, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Think about that for a minute. These are children who, by no choice of their own, have been removed from everything they know to live in a place far from home. In addition to experiencing the trauma that forced them to leave and transitioning into a foreign culture, more often than not they are living in poverty in their new homes. (Continued on page 5.)

*This article appeared originally in NCM Magazine, the Winter 2014 edition. Go to www.ncm.org for information about how the Nazarene denomination is helping current refugees.



Homework: Suggestions for Making It Work - by Lance Howard

Public School Representative and NEW Vice Chairman

Do you know the goal and/or purpose of homework? Some might say that it is to keep students busy at home or to have something that the teacher can have to make sure the students are taking things home every day. There are a variety of positions and opinions on the topic of homework, but I appreciate some of the latest thought and logic being applied to the area of homework.

One movement is connecting the goal of the work and the time spent. As it connects the two together, the goal of homework is to help reinforce current learning or introduce future learning through a metered approach to the time spent per grade level. For example, it would be roughly 10 minutes per grade level (i.e. K = 10 minutes, 1st = 20 minutes, etc.) + a Reading Goal: similar amount of time spent in sustained reading.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (www.ASCD.org) has outlined a quick format for homework and reinforced it with some best practices based on current research. Additionally, Scholastic (<http://www.scholastic.com/>) has given some additional content on this matter that is also a helpful resource.

Specifically, they recommend the following implementation of homework to help it be most effective:

- Assign purposeful homework.
- Carefully monitor the amount of homework assigned.
- Design homework to maximize the chances that students will complete it.
- Involve parents in appropriate ways.

ASCD: 1. Assign purposeful homework. Legitimate purposes for homework include introducing new content, practicing a skill or process that students can do independently but not fluently, elaborating on information that has been addressed in class to deepen students' knowledge, and providing opportunities for students to explore topics of their own interest.

ASCD: 2. Carefully monitor the amount of homework assigned so that it is appropriate to students' age levels and does not take too much time away from other home activities.

ASCD: 3. Design homework to maximize the chances that students will complete it. For example, ensure that homework is at the appropriate level of difficulty. Students should be able to complete homework assignments independently with relatively high success rates, but they should still find the assignments challenging enough to be interesting.

ASCD: 4. Involve parents in appropriate ways (for example, as a sounding board to help students summarize what they learned from the homework) without requiring parents to act as teachers or to police students' homework completion.

Additionally, they cite the research from Cooper (2007) that suggests that their findings support the common "10-minute rule," which states that all daily homework assignments combined should take about as long to complete as 10 minutes multiplied by the student's grade level. He added that when required reading is included as a type of homework, the 10-minute rule might be increased to 15 minutes. (Continued on page 5.)



What Is ED's Stance on Using Testing Data in Teacher Evaluation?

By Marciano Gutierrez

A recent letter to the Department of Education from a teacher in Cincinnati contained a quote that really struck me: "It is not at all that I am afraid of what my test scores might reveal. I am more concerned about what my student's test scores will not reveal."

The quote rings true of so many classrooms across the country, including my own. I teach students who have been removed from other institutions due to behavior, chronic absences, or other issues that have prevented them from being successful in the traditional school setting. (Continued on page 4.)

What Is ED's Stance on Using Testing Data in Teacher Evaluation?

By Marciano Gutierrez

(Continued from page 3.) Each of my students has been identified as a potential dropout and each has a profound set of challenges that manifest in the classroom.

As a U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellow, I have been able to engage with Secretary Duncan's senior staff and have learned more about the Department's stance on teacher evaluation. Like most teachers in the United States, Secretary Duncan strongly believes that a single test result does not adequately reflect the quality or complexity of excellent teaching.

At a speech to the National Council for Social Studies, Mr. Duncan stated, "Just to be 100 percent clear—evaluation should never be based only on test scores. That would be ridiculous. It should also include factors like principal observation or peer review, student work, parent feedback. It should be designed locally—and teachers should be at the table to help design it." The Department's work on educator evaluations has thus been to promote multiple measures to elicit a well-rounded perspective on one's craft and to encourage districts and schools to primarily use these tools as a means for quality professional development. This thinking was also captured in a speech that the Secretary made to Baltimore County teachers this past fall.

As a teacher of students who historically struggle on standardized tests, I understand the concern about tying testing data- which is often influenced by factors outside of my control- to my performance. I am also sometimes frustrated by the quality of the multiple-choice assessments used to assess my students' learning which are ultimately a reflection upon my practice. Despite these challenges, I do believe that there does need to be some measurement of student performance and growth. This information should be collected and analyzed so that we can continuously improve the learning experience for all students and to ensure that we hold ourselves to high standards and continuous improvement.

While the Department's policy has been that measures of student growth and gain should be a 'significant' factor in teacher evaluations, the Secretary has said that, "we intentionally leave that undefined—because different states will have different approaches—and different confidence levels in their assessments."

As a previous Teacher Fellow with the Hope Street Group, and in my current work with Race to the Top states, I have seen a variety of state-developed approaches and strategies that aim to meet this vision. I have come to realize that the strongest evaluation systems have been developed with robust teacher input at every stage of the process. These evaluation systems, which are designed and improved with the practical insight of teachers, use test scores as only one of multiple measures of effectiveness, therefore allowing teachers of students like mine, to demonstrate quality teaching in ways that transcend test scores alone.

Marciano Gutierrez is a 2012 Teaching Ambassador Fellow, on loan from Alta Vista High School in Mountain View, Calif. This article appeared on this website: <http://blog.edgov/topic/standards-and-assessments/>



Homework: Suggestions for Making It Work - by Lance Howard

(Continued from page 3.)

Also, a good position on homework for young children could be to help them keep positive attitudes toward school, develop proper study habits, and communicate to students the concept that, in order to learn well, it means they need to work at home as well as at school. So the focus for students in the early grades can be to develop those positive attitudes, good work habits, and strong character traits. They will also benefit from appropriate parent involvement and reinforce learning of simple skills introduced in class.

By focusing on the amount of time students spend on homework, however, we miss the point of it. A significant proportion of the research on homework indicates that the beneficial effects of homework relate to the amount of homework that the student completes rather than the amount of time spent on homework or the amount of homework assigned. So, by assigning homework we may not produce the desired effect and can even have ill-structured homework that might have a negative effect on student achievement.

The results indicate that teachers need to carefully plan and assign homework in a way that maximizes the potential for student success (see Research-Based Homework Guidelines in the ASCD link).

Special Topic / The Case For and Against Homework <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar07/vol64/num06/The-Case-For-and-Against-Homework.aspx>

Homework: Applying Research to Policy <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/homework-applying-research-policy>



*Uprooted: One Girl's Story of Life as a Refugee**

(Continued from page 2.)

Hana is just one of the millions of children who have been uprooted. She is 14 years old and lives in a Middle Eastern country, where she is attending a Nazarene school.

Adolescence is difficult in the best of all possible worlds, but the Middle East is nowhere near the best of all possible places right now. War, power struggles, religious persecution, political instability, displacement of families, and an increasing number of widows and orphans make the region fragile. In the meantime, children like Hana are caught in the middle.

"I was very sad that we left [my home town]," Hana says. "It was hard to come to the realization that I had to leave this place and leave the people I love."

Hana and her family have moved multiple times in the past three years. Their lives were threatened because of their Christian faith, so they had to stay on the move. Hana and her siblings were terrified, spending hours at a time hiding. Eventually they became refugees, leaving their home country altogether to seek safety in a neighboring country.

Hana has gone through real trauma. She experienced war on top of the fact that people were trying to kill her father and mother and perhaps even her and her siblings. What's more, their refugee status has placed them in a situation of poverty.

"As a family we are still facing financial difficulties due to us leaving our country," Hana says. "There are difficulties in finding a job, and the cost of living here is very high. Now, we do not own anything—no house, no furniture. As a family we have not begun to start a new life because we are not in a stable situation."

On top of all this, even though the new country is also part of the Middle East, Hana had to transition to an entirely new culture.

"It bothered me to be in a new country that was not my country," she says. "Everything was foreign and strange. They [the other students] thought differently from me, and they could not understand me. I counted the minutes until the final school bell for the day would ring."

Eventually Hana's school became a refuge of sorts. The after-school program helped Hana catch up in her studies, and it was a place where she could openly practice the faith that had been a source of persecution in her home country.

Hana is slowly adjusting to her new life and is glad to be going to school and continuing her education. Still, she is a refugee in a country that is not her home. The reality for the millions of refugees around the world is that people leave their homes only as a last resort.

Even with new friendships and having received some awards for her artwork, Hana's life is not easy. She says that her faith sustains her. God is helping Hana and many others like her.

[Editor's note: Please pray for the many children who have been displaced during the recent events. We don't have to know specific names and situations, but we can pray for the children who have fled for safety with their parents or other relatives. Pray especially for those who may be persecuted for their Christian beliefs. For more information about what the Church of the Nazarene is doing to help refugees, go to www.ncm.org.]