

THE HIGH SCHOOL OF COMMERCE**Technology Tips****Special points of interest:**

- **MS Word Mini-Workshop 2/26-3/9/2007**
- **MCAS Re-Test all next week! Check the Calendar on the website for details**
- **The ELA portion of the MCAS (First time takers) will be given 3/20-22. Please check the website for details**
- **Please remember during first block every day there is a mini workshop in room B155. 2 sessions are given for your convenience. The topic this week and next week is "MS WORD and the Higher Applications in the Classroom".**

"Where the rubber meets the road"

Well folks, here we are, back from mid-winter vacation and ready to start in on the most difficult part of the school year in terms of testing (MCAS, DFA's, and any number of other standardized tests, not to mention "regular" classroom assessment) and the stakes couldn't get much higher for our students or, us. To say the period between Winter Vacation and Spring Vacation is always, to put it mildly, "crunch time" for both students and staff is something of an understatement.

For all of us, as staff, we have to keep in mind that the requirements of our SIP (School Improvement Plan) are mandatory. There's not a lot other than that to be said really. For most of us, that means there are some things that we've overlooked due to the necessities of prioritizing our time so things in the evolution of our school here could have some time

to actually take shape. Those things that we might have put on the back burner have to be addressed now because even though we've made great progress with regard to school culture, we also have to make progress with respect to our SIP, HOUSSE requirements, and our obligations to the state for recertification in our various fields.

What does all this mean?

Well, it means that we have to make sure that we have the requisite PD in:

- **Collins Writing**—one writing strategy the school is implementing.
- **Standards Based Planning**—focus being critical reading and writing to answer open response questions in all content areas.
- **Integrating Technology**—focus on the integration and use of various programs to supplement current traditional means of instruction (Word, PowerPoint, Inspiration, etc...)

For much of this, the school has provided training and will continue to do so during the extended day activities. However, some of this you have to attend to yourself. Considering I'm the school's Instructional Technology Specialist, I'll be concentrating on the "Integrating Technology" aspects of the requirements.

During the week, I offer mini-workshops every morning during the first block of the day. Hopefully you've all seen the schedule I've posted, but if you haven't, please let me know, I'll get you one. You only have to come for what would normally be your prep (a sacrifice, I know, but you do get PD credit for it) and that's only about 45 minutes or so. Please, take advantage of the training and the credit.

Longer School Days!!!! Oh My Gawd!!!

It is a distinct possibility folks. The leaders at the DOE are pushing for it in a big kinda way and public opinion is starting to swing that way too.

Now before we all start getting all riled up and feisty about things, think about it for a moment. If we were to look at this from the perspective of having the time to actually do some really interesting projects to supplement our "traditional" lessons, then we might be able to offer students a chance for

deeper understanding of the material we're trying to get across.

In a recent AP article (Nancy Zuckerbrod, Melissa Trujillo. "U.S. Schools Weigh Extending Hours, Year." ABC News 2/26/2007 2/26/2007) there was a comment I found particularly interesting considering the fact that most Congressmen don't really say anything that actually makes sense these days and this one did:

"If you're just extending the day to

bore the hell out of the child, why don't we all just all go home and save the overtime. You've got to rethink these models," said Miller, D-Calif.

Project based learning is something that we've already done here at the HSC. As part of projects, using different means of communicating information by alternating the medium of is a very useful and productive technique. Additionally,

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Longer School Days!!!! Oh My Gawd!!!!

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the use of different mediums for the students to convey their understanding of a subject, or component of the subject, is also an excellent motivator for the student to explore beyond what would be their normal routines and excel. What is almost always lacking is the time for such projects.

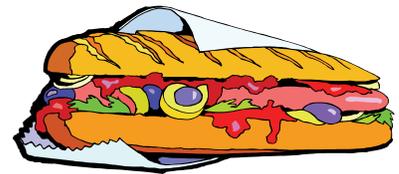
I generally explain the need for time on task in these terms:

“When you’re eating one of those Subway Subs with double meat (the tuna is really good I think) and all the veg-

gies, you generally don’t chow it down in one bite. Why? You’d choke of course. The way you actually get to enjoy that sandwich is by taking your time and eating it slowly, one bite at a time so that you can taste everything and enjoy it as an individual taste, but also as part of the whole sandwich. It’s the same way with learning”.

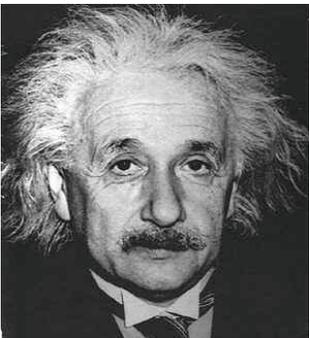
It’s an interesting metaphor don’t you think? Now I’m not saying this is something we have to jump right into or even, buy into. My point is, if we had more time and used it well, without boring the students (and our-

selves) to tears, then why wouldn’t we want to? While extending school days has proponents, with very good points pro and con, I’ll just say that once all the folks who’ll argue the merits back and forth finish their discussions, let me know. I think we could put some serious fun into the way we teach and have the time to cover it well.



“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.”

Albert Einstein



Using Technology without having a nervous breakdown

There are many people who often say to me, “But Ed, you know about this stuff”. You’re right. I do. Of course that doesn’t necessarily mean that I completely understand everything there is to know about computers and their uses. The one thing I can say, since it’s actually my job to do so I’d better get on with it, about the use of any tool is that you need to have patience when you’re beginning to use one in the classroom. Let me explain.

If you’ve been using a computer at home for things like e-mail, the Internet, and maybe some word processing, you have a good start to being able to use computers in your classroom. However, unlike the computer you have at home, there are a number of things you have to know about using a computer at school for things other than your administrative tasks as a teacher.

Think about the fact that there are probably 20 out of the 30 kids in your class that are well beyond your ability in the use of the machine in front of them, especially if they

happen to be older models that have been around the school for a while. Why do I say this? Simply because it is common knowledge. Kids know how to get around security protocols in the older machines and on non-secured sites. They know where to get the “cheat sheets”, essays, and translations of Shakespeare into “their” language. You name it, they can find it. Even a moderately motivated kid can get test answers to the most commonly asked questions on a 10th grade science test given the time.

But don’t despair, every time you think of the fact that our students are very tech savvy in many ways, bring the experience of your life and content knowledge into your planning. Take the knowledge that you are aware of the fact that they can do things in a few minutes intuitively (remember setting the VCR clock after watching it blink for a couple of years) and use it to stretch their limits by offering them a situation where they have to use the skills that they lack or need improvement on.

One example of this might be

a project based assignment where a student explains, in a multimedia presentation, how the chemical compounds that made up the cereal they had for breakfast makes up the constituent parts of their body and the processes by which that happens. That might be an assignment for a chemistry, biology, food science, or health class.

Of course, not all students are tech savvy and they aren’t all able to do the things I’ve described above. We know that. There are many different levels of ability in our classes and we have to find some way to make the concepts we’re teaching accessible to the students on every end of the learning spectrum. Is that even possible? Sure. Of course, it also helps if you’re not afraid to ask for help when you need it. I can do that when you’re planning for using technology.

Next Time we’ll talk about working around the hardware issues we have at the good ol’ HSoftC.

Informed Instruction??? Another new “strategy”????

Actually, it’s not new at all. It’s just another method of saying what teachers have been doing all along. You take information from some sort of assessment (formal or not) and structure lessons building on strengths and remediating or supplementing areas where students have deficiencies. That’s what we do.

Advances in technology have certainly been instrumental in the widespread use of programs like PLATO and Read180 in schools like ours and others across the city. Millions of dollars in grants have funded studies on the impact using such programs has on the education of students who perform below grade level. For us, the *Striving Readers*

Grant is just such a program on a large scale (from the perspective of The HSC).

While we wait for the results that the study will give, it would seem to be a shame not to take a stab at making our instructional practices more informed by using the information at our disposal to guide what we do. Now I know what you’re thinking. “Why should I re-teach *Macbeth* again?” You don’t have to.

Understand that if you look at the results of your *Macbeth* unit test and many students didn’t grasp the concept of conscience, you don’t have to go back to *Macbeth* and do it all over again. Modify your lessons and illustrate the concept in your next lesson when you

teach *Black Boy* (the bit where Richard sets the house on fire can be related).

The point is, using technology the technology that we actually have on hand can help you here. From the basic administrative tasks like attendance and grade keeping, to things like project based learning assignments to help the students gain a deeper understanding of a topic or technique by investing more of themselves into the project and thereby taking ownership of their learning.



And so gentle readers...

I suppose there are lots of things that I could talk (rant) about this week, but the most pressing thing on my mind is the testing that’s coming up. MCAS and all the rest that will take up much of the month of March.

I suppose the phrase “March Madness” takes on a whole new meaning when we think about the fact that most folks will be losing their minds during the period of the re-take for those students in 11th and 12th grade, while it’ll only be the folks in ELA who’re going to be considered clinically insane at some point in the later part of the month.

I understand their pain, believe me. I’m fully aware of the responsibilities involved with test materials and security, proctors and their instructions for delivering the tests, labels, pencils, UPC codes, and the ever present shipping fiascos that inevitably surface at some point. You would have thought by now there’d be a GPS tracking chip on each test so that the NSA, CIA, FBI, Moussad, KGB, or whoever would know where these flippin’ tests

are every step of the way. I mean where’s Jack Bauer when you need him?

Of course I keep going back to discuss the issue of transportation of these tests. Considering how “high stakes” these tests are for: the student, their teachers, the administrators, the school as a whole, and the district, one might think that there’d be armed security as the copies intended for the HSofC were unloaded and spirited into the safe in the front office in the dead of night or, at the very least, sometime around dawn (or just after). Additionally, considering the Internal Revenue Service has folks trained for this sort of thing, why isn’t an officer from that department coming down with the test forms and checking them in one by one?

Mind you, all this is just a precursor for the actual administration of the test. It astounds me when I think of how scripted taking this test has become. Everything from the way students are taught how to answer a question (re-phrase the question), to the proctor’s instructions on what to say when beginning the “Long Write” portion of the exam (“This is the Composition Portion of the MCAS Exam...”). I’ll have to admit, I’m somewhat surprised that a quotation from Dante isn’t above the door of

every classroom used for testing.

Don’t get me wrong here folks, I do believe in standards. I do believe that there should be accountability for everyone involved in the process of educating young people (including the young people) so that they have the opportunity for success. I don’t believe in having one test that so thoroughly sets kids up even before taking it. I don’t believe that we should have one stick we use to measure everyone’s progress. Whether it’s fair or not, realistic in the “real world” or not, that’s immaterial. The fact is, we need to have more than *data* to figure out the growth of a child that’s been in our care. I think the “real world” could use a bit of thinking “outside the box”

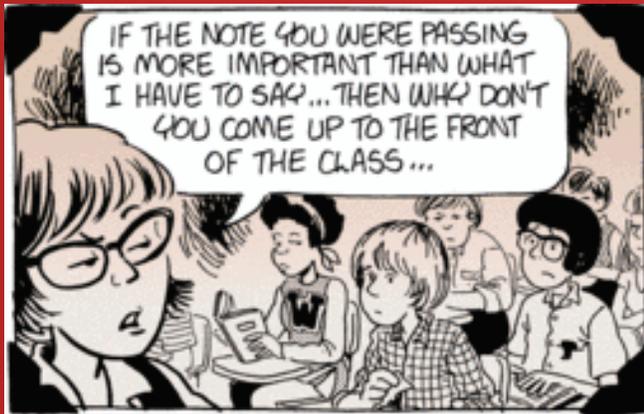
Of course, that’s just my opinion.

“Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save.”

Will Rogers

Ed Musiak

Life Lessons in Comics



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