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WAYS TO IMPLEMENT THE PRACTICES OF THE MET SCHOOL
INTO A TRADITIONAL GRADE 3-5 CLASSROOM

by

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A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

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Abstract

Ways to Implement the Practices of the Met School into a Grade 3-5 Classroom

This project was designed to give grade 3-5 teachers ideas to implement in their classrooms based on the practices of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) in Providence, Rhode Island. The Met School is a high school where personalization, interest-based learning, exhibitions, real-life experiences and parent communication are their main focuses. This in-service presentation focuses on ways to make a classroom more personalized, how to manage a classroom where each student is doing a project of his or her own interest, how to prepare students to do a quarterly exhibition and the importance of communication among students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The intended use of these practices is for teachers to modify the way children and parents are treated both on an academic and on a personal level in their schools and classrooms.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Today, public educators may receive criticism because it is perceived that they do not teach students what they need to know. However, if teachers are provided with adequate time to know their students' strengths and needs and strategies for implementation of practices, students can be successful on high stakes tests as well as in their own endeavors. Through an examination of the practices used at the Metropolitan (Met School) Regional Career and Technical Center, in Providence, Rhode Island, it should be possible to identify the ways in which those practices can be implemented into a third, fourth, or fifth grade classroom.

Statement of the Problem

Currently, educators are faced with many theories, from which they can choose, to ensure sufficient learning for their students. The topics of literacy, mathematics, and unit study take up the majority of the elementary student's day, and each of these subjects require a great amount of practice and patience. In public schools, there are many students who do not learn these subjects easily in a traditional classroom. Many fall behind and, eventually, drop out of school and lose their love for learning. Charter and private schools are available and, sometimes, they are a suitable alternative for students, but they are not always accessible for those who have special learning styles and need an alternative to traditional schooling.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project will be to develop an in-service professional development training that can be presented to educators in Grades 3-5. At the Met School in Providence, Rhode Island, the faculty has shown documented success with atypical learners. The author of this project will explain how the strategies used at the Met School can be implemented into a traditional public intermediate classroom.

Definition of Terms

The following list of words and phrases are terms that will be used throughout the proposal and in Chapter 3, in particular:

Advisory: A group of 14-15 students and a teacher who stay together for 4 years and work closely with one another (Levine, 2002).

Met School: The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, RI. It is a charter high school that consists of six small schools with 110 students in each school (Levine, 2002).

Learning through Internship (LTI): Students at the Met School are required to participate in an internship in the community each year to broaden their life experiences (Levine, 2002).

Service Learning: Community service that adds an explicit educational component (Levine, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Through the implementation of the practices found at the Met School, it is this researcher's position that students can be more engaged and highly successful learners. The goal of this project will be to examine the practices used at the Met School in order to develop methods that can be implemented in an intermediate classroom.

In Chapter 2, a review of literature is presented to support this position and provide suggestions for the overall success of students. In Chapter 3, the methods for the development of an in-service professional development training will be provided.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this project will be to develop an in-service professional development training for presentation to educators in Grades 3-5 for them to consider the utilization of teaching strategies for atypical learners. At the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (Met School) in Providence, Rhode Island, the faculty has shown documented success with atypical learners (Littky, 2004). The author of this project will explain how the strategies used at the Met School can be implemented into a traditional public intermediate classroom. This author believes that educators would find this to be a method that inspires students who struggle with traditional teaching methods.

History of Educational Theory

The idea of free education for all children has been in place since before the 16th C. in Europe. In the 1500s, Protestant Reformer John Calvin believed in popular education. He thought that the church should control universal education. In the 17th C., John Wycliff promoted the idea that the state should take the responsibility for the education of its children. Generally, in the 17th C., the responsibility still fell on the church to educate children. It was not until the 18th C. that the state took steps to support the schools. In the United States, as early as 1642, Massachusetts made it mandatory for towns to educate their children (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a). In addition, New Hampshire has had a public education system since 1647 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005c).

Despite the progression of a few hundred years, in the late 19th and early 20th Cs, U.S. citizens became dissatisfied with the educational system. In Horace Mann's (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005b) lifetime, he saw the educational system of Massachusetts decline, and he blamed it on the control of the government and the use of public funds for the schools. Because of this, Mann worked on a reform movement that, in 1837, resulted in a State Board of Education whose members controlled the funds and publicized school information. Other educators and philosophers began to show their distaste for education in the late 19th C. John Dewey was a prominent thinker of the time and has left his mark as a leader in the Progressive education reform movement (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a). Dewey led the University of Chicago Laboratory School, one of the first experimental schools in the U.S.

The common goal of all was to eliminate the school's traditional stiffness and to break down hard and fast subject-matter lines. Each school adopted an activity program. Each operated on the assumption that education was something that should not be imposed from without but should draw forth the latent possibilities from within the child. And each believed in the democratic concept of individual worth. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a)

In *Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1938), Dewey discussed how neither the old methods, nor the new progressive method of education, were sufficient, because neither placed enough emphasis on genuine experiences. Dewey believed that the use of traditional education provided children with experiences, but they were the wrong kind of experiences. According to Dewey, many children became bored or lost the desire to learn because of the way in which the information was presented to them in school.

Dewey, (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a) along with many other educators began to promote a child centered form of education. This was an idea foreign to the traditionalists who believed students should sit silently, learning solely from the lecture of the teacher (2005a). In 1875, the superintendent of schools in Quincy, Massachusetts, Francis W. Parker, established the Quincy Plan which,

eliminated the rigid formalities of traditional school routine, arranged interrelated subjects around a central core, and emphasized socialized activities and creative self-expression. The curriculum included field trips, art, music, crafts, science, and physical training, with the purpose of developing each child's individual personality. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005d, p. 1).

Other similar programs were established around the country such as: (a) the Play School and the Walden School in New York City; (b) Carleton Washburne's Winnetka Plan, instituted in 1919 at Winnetka, Illinois; and (c) the Gary Plan, developed in 1908 at Gary, Indiana (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a).

Maria Montessori is another educator whose Progressive ideas have had a lasting effect on education today (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a). Originally, Montessori developed her ideas to use in schools with children with special needs. However, she began to wonder if these special methods might be effective for typical children as well. Montessori believed that the educators' job was "to remove their perceptions of superiority, and to make them humble and passive in their attitudes toward the young. The next move should be to provide a new environment in which the child has a chance to live a life of his own" (p. 181). Another educator whose work is similar to Montessori's is Ovide Decroly (2005a). Decroly based his ideas on the work that had been done with children with special needs, also. The Decroly method is most well

known for the workshop classroom, where children go freely to their own jobs. The jobs are a carefully designed group of activities based on the needs of children. Decroly and Montessori's methods have been used in schools throughout the world and can be seen in classrooms today as "flexible and cooperative methods" and the idea of schools as "learning communities" (2005a, p. 181).

The Directors of the Met School cited Dewey's (1938) work with meaningful experiences as one of the major contributors to their beliefs about education (Littky, 2004). All activities at the Met School are based upon student experience and making school meaningful and interesting for students.

In 1983, the members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued a report titled, *A Nation At Risk* (Gardner et al., 1983). The report showed that U.S. students were behind other countries in education, and many students, who graduated from U.S. high schools, were functionally illiterate. They stated that, "Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest test of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate" (Gardner et al., ¶ 20).

In addition to philosophers such as Dewey (1938), the founders of the Met School maintained that U.S. high school students should stay in school. Although it is the goal of educators to keep students in school, this was a primary goal for the founders of the Met School. Based on Dewey's thoughts on meaningful experiences and the functional illiteracy of students in the U.S. (Gardner et al., 1983), the founders initiated their concept of a successful school.

After *A Nation At Risk* (Gardner et al., 1983) was published, U.S. Legislators began to think of ways to improve education in the U.S. In 1989, President Bush and the State Governors met to create goals for education. The following are the National Education Goals (U.S. Department of Education, 1993):

By the year 2000:

1. Every child will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.
4. The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
5. U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
6. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
7. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
8. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. (¶ 6)

To improve U.S. education, the Legislators created the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education). There are four pillars to NCLB: (a) stronger accountability for results, (b) more freedom for states and communities, (c) proven education methods, and (d) more choices for parents.

The purpose of stronger accountability for schools is meant to help close the achievement gap between groups of students, such as gender or ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Also, the intent is to inform parents and community members about the progress of each school through the use of school report cards. If there is inefficient student progress, school staff will receive help from the government and be required to dramatically change how the school is conducted.

More freedom for states and communities means that school and district staff have the freedom to use the money they receive from the government in any way they see fit (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). School staff could put the money toward the reading program or use it to hire more qualified teachers. This pillar provides freedom that has never been given before to states and communities.

The use of proven education methods is the strategy that the Legislators have put in place for school staff to begin teaching more effectively with the use of research based teaching methods (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The government provides money for education research and support for schools where research based methods are used; federal funds are available for educational research.

More choices for parents means that parents have choices other than their neighborhood school for their child's enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). This applies when there is inadequate progress at a school for 2 consecutive years. In addition, if a child fails to meet state standards for 3 years in a row, parents have the right to enroll their child in another public school. Finally, if a child is a victim of a violent

crime while at school, his or her parent may choose a safer school for their child to attend within the district.

Although the Met School directors do not agree with all the pillars of NCLB, they feel strongly that parents should be presented with more choices for their child's education (D. Littky, personal communication, April 25, 2005). The Met School was founded as an alternative choice for parents who did not feel that their child would be successful in a traditional school classroom.

In conclusion, this section of the review of literature traces the history of education as it pertains to the development of the Met School. The founders of the Met school believe in an appropriate education for all children, and the history shows that the idea of universal education is not new. The founders of the Met School, like most people, believe that education should be universal. However, the difference between the staff at the Met School and other educators is that they believe that, if one type of education is not effective for a student, it is the responsibility of the members of society to provide a new type of education that will work. Additionally, the history of Progressive education described here supports the theories upon which the Met School was founded. Lasting effects from the movement include: (a) imaginative writing and reading classes, (b) projects linked to the community, and (c) discovery methods of learning (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2005a). The directors of the Met School continually reference the NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) as well as Dewey (1938) when they discuss the major influences behind the establishment of the Met School.

Progressive School Reform

Progressive education has come to be known as education that makes schools more democratic, as opposed to institutions in which students move through dictated courses with no relevance to their real lives (University of Vermont, 2002). There are many differences in style in progressive schools, but each has at least two commonalities: (a) respect for diversity; and (b) the development of a critical, socially engaged intelligence. Based on these constructs, students are to become a functional, contributing member of society. These types of progressive ideas have never been prominent in the U.S. Historically, the purpose of the U.S. educational system was to develop dutiful citizens, not critical ones. In addition, over the years, there have been efforts to establish cultural uniformity, in contrast to the philosophy of progressive education and its position on cultural diversity, which is key to any effective educational system (University of Vermont).

Dewey (1938, as cited in University of Vermont, 2002) advocated the Progressive movement between the 1920s and 1950s. He taught a group of educators about the importance of the artistic, emotional, and creative aspects of education. During this time, Progressive high schools were established and, in the Eight Year Study, Tyler (1936, as cited in Muir, Brooks, & Haywood, 2002) showed that students from progressive high schools achieved as much as other students in college.

The graduates of the most experimental schools were strikingly more successful than their matches. Differences in their favor were much greater than the differences between the total Thirty Schools and their comparison group. Conversely, there were no large or consistent differences between the least experimental graduates and their comparison group. For these students the differences were smaller and less consistent than for the total Thirty Schools and their comparison group. (¶ 4)

The Coalition for Essential Schools (CES) emerged from Sizer's (1984, as cited in CES, 2002) study on the performance of U.S. high schools in the early 1980s. He conducted a 5 year study on teaching, learning, and school history and design and found that, not only were U.S. high schools very similar, also, many were inadequate.

In his book, *Horace's Compromise*, Sizer (1984) provided many examples of how difficult it is for a high school teacher to adequately serve his or her students. He gave an example of a teacher in a suburban high school who had 120 students each day. Also, he noted that, in an inner city school, the number would be closer to 175. For a teacher to provide quality time to each of these students seems nearly impossible.

When Sizer (1984) realized the inadequacies of the U.S. public high school, he began to develop ways to change it. Sizer developed 10 common principles that the members of a community could use to establish a high school that would fit their needs. The 10 principles are: (a) learn to use one's mind well; (b) less is more, depth over coverage; (c) the goals should apply to all students; (d) personalization; (e) student as worker, teacher as coach; (f) demonstration of mastery; (g) an atmosphere of decency and trust; (h) commitment to the entire school; (i) resources dedicated to teaching and learning; and (j) the presence of democracy and equity.

In 1974, Meier (2002) initiated an alternative elementary school, Central Park East Elementary School, in New York because she found that the schools her own children attended were overcrowded, and the teachers were over worked. For Meier, the issue was, "How the children at the bottom of America's social ladder could use their

schools to develop rather than stunt their intellectual potential, [and] how to provide at public expense for the least advantaged what the most advantaged bought privately for their own children” (p. 19).

With the full support of the district administrators, Meier (2002) built a school that “was not stocked with ditto fill-in sheets but literally full of stuff: books of every sort, paints as well as paintings, plants, animals, broken radios to repair—things” (p. 21). Also, Meier wanted to develop a school in which the U.S. idea of democracy was supported. She wanted the students to have more of a say in their education, at least more than what was possible in traditional schools.

In addition, Meier (2002) established a school in which “respect [was fostered] among staff, parents, students, and the larger community” (p. 22). Teachers were given adequate time for planning and reflection, and the parents perceived that the staff was caring, open, friendly, and committed.

In 1974, Central Park East Elementary School was one of the first alternative schools to open in the New York City area (Meier, 2002). Today, there are 52 schools in the area. That number is larger than most entire districts in other parts of the country. One innovation was for many schools to occupy the same building space. This began the school-within-a-school concept that the CES (2002) promotes, as well as other organizations such as the Oregon and Colorado Small Schools Initiatives started with money received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Meier, 2002). By 1984, 3 schools had branched off from Central Park East, and this led Sizer (1984, as cited in Meier) to ask, “Why not a Central Park East secondary school?” (p. 29).

Thus, the examples shown in this review of literature of Progressive School Reform portray successful examples of progressive philosophies that have been established in both high schools and elementary schools. Meier's (2002) success at the Central Park East Elementary School suggests that the ideas this author will present can be effective in traditional Grades 3-5 classrooms.

Experiential Learning

“Experiential learning can apply to any kind of learning through experience” (Greenaway, 2004, ¶ 2). The Foxfire Approach is one method of experiential learning that has been in practice since 1966 (Starnes & Carone, 2002). The Foxfire Approach was initiated by the efforts of one man, Eliot Wigginton (1966, as cited in Starnes & Carone). His experiences in teaching high school led him to desire a more student centered classroom. Wigginton was an English teacher, so he decided to have the students produce a magazine. Their ownership of the magazine inspired the students to write and really care about what they produced.

“By the mid-seventies, the national recognition generated by the books and magazines brought Foxfire to the attention of teachers around the country who were struggling with the same issues Wigginton had faced” (Starnes & Carone, 2002, p. 4). Many teachers tried some of Wigginton's ideas, but none of them were as successful as the original. “They could see that the ‘Foxfire clones,’ as they called them, simply duplicated the product, not the experience—and they say that cloning the product meant failure” (p.5). The teachers and students, who led the Foxfire movement, began to develop a group of Core Practices that all teachers could follow in their classrooms.

Listed below are the 11 Core Practices that were developed by the Foxfire teachers and students.

1. The work teachers and learners do together is infused from the beginning with learner choice, design, and revision. The central focus of the work grows out of learners' interests and concerns. (p. 20)
2. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and collaborator. Teachers are responsible for assessing and attending to learner's developmental needs, providing guidance, identifying academic givens, monitoring each learner's academic and social growth, and leading each into new areas of understanding and competence. (p. 30)
3. The academic integrity of the work teachers and learners do together is clear. Mandated skills and learning expectations are identified to the class. Through collaborative planning and implementation, students engage and accomplish the mandates. In addition, activities assist learners in discovering the value and potential of the curricula and its connections to other disciplines. (p. 42)
4. The work is characterized by active learning. Learners are thoughtfully engaged in the learning process, posing and solving problems, making meaning, producing products, and building understandings. (p. 54)
5. Peer teaching, small group work, and teamwork are all consistent features of classroom activities. Every learner is not only included, but needed, and in the end, each can identify her or his specific stamp upon the effort. (p. 68)
6. Connections between the classroom work, the surrounding communities, and the world beyond the community are clear. Course content is connected to the community in which the learners live. Learners' work will "bring home" larger issues by identifying attitudes about and illustrations and implication of those issues in their home communities. (p. 82)
7. There is an audience beyond the teacher for learner work. It may be another individual, or a small group, or the community, but it is an audience the learners want to serve or engage. The audience, in turn, affirms the work is important, needed and worth doing. (p. 94)
8. New activities spiral gracefully out of the old, incorporating lessons learned from past experiences, building on skills and understandings that can now be amplified. (p. 106)
9. Imagination and creativity are encouraged in the completion of learning activities. It is the learners' freedom to express and explore, to observe and investigate, and to discover that are the basis for aesthetic experiences. These experiences provide a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction and lead to deeper understanding and an internal thirst for knowledge. (p. 118)

10. Reflection is an essential activity that takes place at key points throughout the work. Teachers and learners engage in conscious and thoughtful consideration of the work and the process. It is this reflective activity that evokes insight and gives rise to revisions and refinements. (p. 132)
11. The work teachers and learners do together includes rigorous, ongoing assessment and evaluation. Teachers and learners employ a variety of strategies to demonstrate their mastery of teaching and learning objectives. (p. 146)

According to Starnes and Carone, these Core Practices were developed to guide teachers in their efforts to educate children. The Foxfire teachers believe in a student led, rigorous, safe classroom environment. Many teachers, at every grade level, have been able to use these Core Practices in different ways. Teachers who use the Foxfire approach say that it enables them to develop a learning environment where students are not only excited about learning, but where the students meet the curricular mandates set forth by the states and districts in which they teach.

In conclusion, this section of the literature review on experiential learning suggests that the Met School model for education (Levine, 2002) can be implemented into a traditional elementary while meeting the state mandates at the same time. According to Levine's in depth analysis of the practices at the Met School, much of their work revolves around student interest and real life experiences. These are the same beliefs that are used by the members of the Foxfire Approach.

The Met School

The Met School in Providence, Rhode Island, is an alternative public high school (Levine, 2002). It is open to anyone in the state who would like to apply. There is a waiting list, and therefore, a lottery system is utilized to select students for enrollment.

The Met approach is extremely personalized (Levine, 2002). Each student is placed in a 15 person advisory group, with which they stay for the entire 4 years. They have an advisor who works with them for all 4 years as well. Students, along with their parents and advisor, develop an Individual Learning Plan each quarter. Parents are contacted frequently, and they are involved in every decision that affects their child.

The school day consists of many parts (Levine, 2002). Each student is part of an advisory group with which they meet at least three times per week. This is where they have direct lessons about information they will need to use in upcoming activities and where they have discussions about current events. Also, all students, Grades 9-12, take part in a Learning Through Internship (LTI) project. Students are required to call, schedule initial interviews, and do follow up to develop a workable internship. Two full school days each week are spent at the internship. Also, each student completes an independent project that is related to his or her internship. The Met School staff makes it clear that the project must be of benefit for the company where the internship takes place. Not only do students provide a presentation about what they have learned; also, they must develop something that will benefit their internship host.

When students are not involved in an internship, they work on a service learning project (Levine, 2002). Service learning is defined as an activity that benefits the community, but has an explicit educational component as well. Another activity that students are required to find time for is journal writing. They are expected to write three times per week, and their advisors respond to them promptly. This is another way that the Met School staff addresses personalized learning.

“To graduate, each senior must plan and carry out a year-long project that benefits the student and a larger community” (Levine, 2002, p. 66). In this way, a major rite of passage is developed for the senior students. They develop a project that benefits some part of the community. Previous projects included the organization of a rally to support a local issue and writing and directing a play for a local theater.

Many of the ways that the Met School staff educate their students are nontraditional (Levine, 2002). However, in an attempt to prepare them for the real world of college and to give them an extra challenge, students can enroll in college classes at a nearby community college. Many students take mathematics or science courses in college because,

Of the five learning goals, quantitative reasoning [mathematics] has been the most difficult for the Met to achieve using interest-based methods. Advisors strive to integrate it into student projects, but this rarely happens to the Met’s satisfaction. Most students who develop high-level quantitative skills do so through methods that have much in common with traditional math classes—SAT prep groups, in-school workshops, one-on-one skills tutoring, and college classes. (p. 90).

Every student at the Met School practices public speaking at an exhibition held each quarter (Levine, 2002). During an exhibition, the students present their work for the term to a panel of parents, students, advisors, and anyone else the student wishes to invite. The exhibition lasts 1 hour and includes time for feedback from the panel members.

Test preparation is unavoidable for any U.S. high school student (Levine, 2002). The Met School staff recognize their students’ need for test taking skills. Therefore, they help the students to understand the types of questions they might see on the state tests and

how the questions are scored. “One advisor estimated that students average two hours per week explicitly focused on exam preparation” (p. 72).

Another activity at the Met School, in order to help its students be successful, is Summer learning (Levine, 2002). “At the Met, finding worthwhile summer pursuits is an official part of each student’s fourth-quarter learning plan” (p. 71). Each student must leave at the end of the year with a plan for how they will continue their learning throughout the Summer. The Met School staff go to great lengths to help students find Summer jobs or a scholarship to travel. Some examples of Summer learning are: (a) working with the Providence summer job corps, (b) travel to Venezuela to learn Spanish, or (c) attend the Met 4 week Summer school.

Parts that Still Need Improvement

The Met School is successful in many ways, but the staff admit that their system is not perfect (Levine, 2002). Many of the LTI projects make working history, science, economics and other subjects into the school day very easy. However, mathematics is the one area where the program is not as effective. It is extremely difficult to incorporate mathematics into every LTI project. In some of the projects, mathematics can be incorporated, but there are too many that do not work. Every year, the staff works to develop ways to work mathematics into the system but, presently, mathematics is taught very traditionally. Students have part of the day that is dedicated to very traditional mathematics teaching.

Success Stories

One of the greatest measures of success is student engagement (Levine, 2002). The Met School boasts a “7% absentee rate, which is one-third the average 20% rate for the other eight Providence high schools” (p. 131). Another statistic is the Met School rate of disciplinary suspensions, 1.4%, compared to the average 25.4% suspension rate for other Providence high schools. During the first 4 years that the Met School was open, they had an 8% drop out rate, which is one-third the average 27% drop out rate for other Providence high schools. The Met School has had a 100% student acceptance rate to college every year since the program was established.

The Met School staff administered the Metropolitan Achievement Test (Harcourt Educational Measurement, 2002, as cited in Levine, 2002) to all of its ninth grade students at the beginning and end of the school year. The “math scores rose by 1.9 grade levels and reading scores increased by 1.4 grade levels” (p. 134).

Opposition to the Big Picture Philosophy

Despite extensive Internet searches and discussions with leaders of the group that oversees the Met School, the Big Picture Company, this author has been unable to locate any direct opposition to the Big Picture philosophy of education. In a conversation about opposition to the Big Picture philosophy with Baggliata (personal communication, May 10, 2005), a Director at the Big Picture Company, he stated that, “I don’t have any specifics to offer – there are other models, like the Edison model that are founded on a standardized specific content related curriculum for every child – NCLB is not where we are right now and Hirsh has his books about what every 3rd grader needs to know.”

Baggliata (personal communication, May 10, 2005) reported that the NCLB is, “not where we are right now.” Testing and standard curricula are not the focal point of the methods used at the Met School (Levine, 2002). However, in most school districts, the focus is on testing, standardized curricula, and student data. This is a result of the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Congress, 2002) of 2001. This approach is very different than the Big Picture philosophy. One benefit to this approach is the distinct ability to show success in terms of test scores. The hope is that the use of the standard curricula and statewide tests will ensure that all students learn the same content. The following are some of the requirements of the NCLB.

(B) SAME STANDARDS. —The academic standards required by subparagraph (A) shall be the same academic standards that the State applies to all schools and children in the State.

CHALLENGING ACADEMIC STANDARDS.—Standards under this paragraph shall include—(i) challenging academic content standards in academic subjects that—(I) specify what children are expected to know and be able to do; (II) contain coherent and rigorous content; and (III) encourage the teaching of advanced skills; and (ii) challenging student academic achievement standards that— (I) are aligned with the State’s academic content standards;

(A) IN GENERAL.—Each State plan shall demonstrate that the State has developed and is implementing a single, statewide State accountability system that will be effective in ensuring that all local educational agencies, public 115 STAT. 1446 PUBLIC LAW 107–110—JAN. 8, 2002 elementary schools, and public secondary schools make adequate yearly progress as defined under this paragraph.

[Each state’s accountability system shall --] (iii) include sanctions and rewards, such as bonuses and recognition, the State will use to hold local educational agencies and public elementary schools and secondary schools accountable for student achievement and for ensuring that they make adequate yearly progress in accordance with the State’s definition under subparagraphs (B) and (C). (pp. 21-22)

Although the founders of the Met School do not agree with parts of the NCLB, they are proving that students can learn and pass standardized tests, as mandated by the NCLB.

These requirements from the U.S. federal government are meant to hold schools accountable for student learning. The Met School's students are learning; they are just doing it in a way that looks different than that of a typical high school.

A Look at the K-8 Schools

This author learned about the CVS Highlander K-8 School in Providence, Rhode Island, through a phone conversation (personal communication, May 17, 2005) with the Principal, Donahue, and e-mail (personal communication, June 2, 2005) conversations with the Division Director, Dibello. (The acronym "CVS" comes from the name of a pharmacy chain in New England that sponsored the school and thus has been included in their school name.) The CVS Highlander is a charter school, and it has been in operation for 5 years. The staff divided the school into a lower school (i.e., Grades K-4) and a middle school (i.e., Grades 5-8). The school staff have incorporated all of the Big Picture principles into its curriculum. Class size at Highlander is limited to 16 students per classroom. Each student has a learning plan that is developed by the parents, teacher, and student. Next year, due to state mandate, all lower school students will have a learning plan that is focused on reading. In August, the teacher makes a home visit to get to know the student and parents. The first 6 weeks of school are *discovery* time, where the students explore new ideas, and the teachers have time to do assessments and become knowledgeable about the student's strengths and weaknesses (J. Donahue, personal communication, May 29, 2005).

Every student in the school presents an exhibition at the end of the trimester (J. Donahue, personal communication, May 29, 2005). Each exhibition may look a bit

different depending on the student's age and ability. For example, kindergarten students may perform a play, as part of a *class exhibition*. First grade students might do a short introduction before they read their own fairy tale to the group. As the students move into the middle school, increasingly, their exhibitions look like an individual presentation. All exhibitions include a visual and a public speaking piece.

Project based learning is emphasized at the CVS Highlander School (J. Donahue, personal communication, May 29, 2005). When the Learning Plan is designed, it includes a project that the student will complete by the end of the trimester. However, as stated above, a kindergarten student's project may be very different than an eighth grade student's project.

Internships are the only principle of the Big Picture that poses a problem at the elementary school level (J. Donahue, personal communication, May 29, 2005). In a conversation with Principal Donohue at CVS Highlander School, this author learned that most of what they do is in the form of group community experiences. For example, they hired (e.g., funded by a grant they received) a dance company to come and share their expertise with a group of second grade students. They helped the students prepare a dance to perform at their exhibition. This involved the community and exposed the students to another area of the world in which they may have interested in later. On a case-by-case basis, more traditional internships are allowed. A second grade student wanted to learn about the zoo. The school staff linked him with a local cinematographer who mentored the boy. He was able to create a video documentary of the Providence

Zoo that was shown at the Summer film festival in Providence (J. Donahue, personal communication, May 29, 2005).

In sum, this author's review of the literature on the CVS Highlander K-8 School clearly suggests that the Met School model can work in an elementary school setting. Although some of the tasks are designed with a teenage child in mind, thought has been put into how to adapt these practices so they are achievable for students even at an elementary school level.

Chapter Summary

Through this review of literature this author has shown how the Met School has developed its practices based on other known philosophies and educational practices. The topics that have been covered in this chapter include: (a) a history of education, (b) progressive school reform, (c) experiential learning, (d) a summary of the Met School, (e) a review of the Big Picture CVS Highlander K-8 school, (f) parts of the Met's practices that still need improvement, (g) opposition to the Big Picture philosophy, and (h) success stories from the Met School. This review of literature shows that the philosophies that guide the Met School date back to the early beginnings of U.S. education. In addition, the literature on experiential learning, Progressive school reform, and the study of the CVS Highlander K-8 School show groundwork for implementation of the Met School's practices into a traditional 3-5 classroom for the benefit of atypical learners who struggle in a traditional classroom.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The purpose of this project was to identify ways to implement the specific practices of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (Met School) in Providence, Rhode Island into traditional Grade 3-5 classrooms. The Met School came to the attention of this researcher after she read *The Big Picture* (Littky, 2004). The book was based on the start up of the Met School and its successes with high school students. The founders of the Met School, Littky and Washor, have worked many years in education to create a more authentic learning experience for students who will become life long learners. Although the Met School practices are designed to be effective with high school students, it is this researcher's belief that many of the practices can be easily and effectively adapted for elementary school students.

Target Audience

The groups or individuals that would be interested in the use of this project and its applications would be Grade 3-5 elementary school teachers and administrators. The teachers could use this project to develop an authentic learning environment that takes students beyond just the performance of a task or memorization of facts that will be forgotten soon after the test.

Goals of the Applied Project

The goal for this project was for the researcher to develop an in-service workshop to educate teachers in the target audience on ways to implement the Met practices into their own classrooms. The purpose of this workshop was to show the teachers ways to put these practices into their regular day, without change to the entire curriculum that they are meant to follow.

Procedures

The researcher used knowledge gained from multiple sources to develop ways for educators to implement these practices into their classroom. The sources included, but were not limited to: (a) *The Big Picture* (Littky, 2004); (b) *One Student At a Time*, (Levine, 2002); (c) personal experiences from the April 2005 Conference at the Met School; and (e) phone and e-mail conversations with fellow educators.

The researcher has taken into consideration the Colorado State Standards (Colorado Department of Education, 2005) and other constraints of the public school system, such as funding, resources and assessments. After taking these aspects of the public school system into account, the researcher considered which practices from the Met School would be possible to implement into the classroom.

Chapter Summary

Through readings, personal experiences and personal communication, the researcher has developed an effective way to use the ideas and practices of the Met School in a traditional grade 3-5 classroom. The researcher has taken as many ideas from the experiences with the Met School as possible and has worked them into a usable

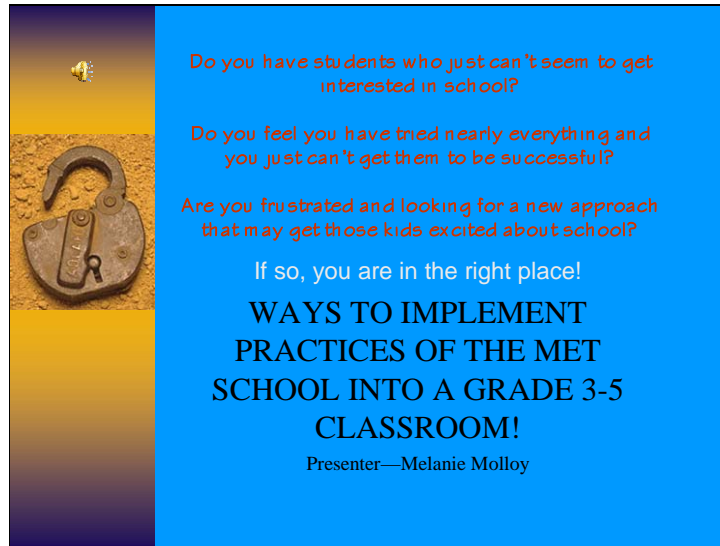
handbook and informative workshop for teachers to use in their traditional Grade 3-5 classrooms.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This project was designed to give teachers in grades 3-5 ideas and strategies to implement the practices of the Met School into their traditional public school classrooms. The four main practices that this project focuses on are: (a) personalization, (b) interest-based learning, (c) exhibitions, and (d) communication. The slides and narration that follow are meant to give background from this author's research as well as real examples from a fourth grade classroom in Colorado.

Slide 1



Do you have students who just can't seem to get interested in school?

Do you feel you have tried nearly everything and you just can't get them to be successful?

Are you frustrated and looking for a new approach that may get those kids excited about school?

If so, you are in the right place!

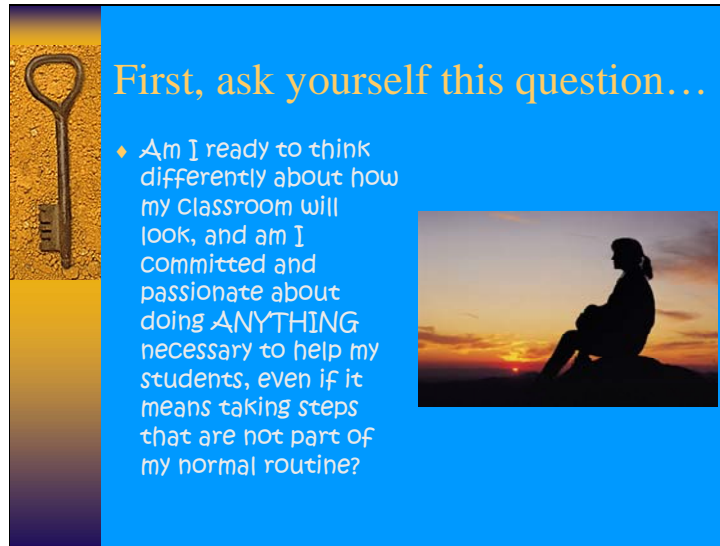
WAYS TO IMPLEMENT PRACTICES OF THE MET SCHOOL INTO A GRADE 3-5 CLASSROOM!

Presenter—Melanie Molloy

(This slide will be up as educators are entering. Inspirational music will be playing from the slide.)

Good Morning! Welcome and thank you for coming. I hope that you are able to take back some of these ideas and use them in your own classrooms. I have tested these ideas in a 4th grade classroom. I have not worked out all the glitches, but I can give you lots of warnings about potential road blocks.

Slide 2



First, ask yourself this question...

- ◆ Am I ready to think differently about how my classroom will look, and am I committed and passionate about doing ANYTHING necessary to help my students, even if it means taking steps that are not part of my normal routine?

I want to make sure that people understand that this is not a traditional way of teaching and that they need to be ready to change how they think about certain things. I don't want to waste anyone's time and I don't want anyone to think this is just another "do the worksheet, and sit in your seat quietly" type of learning.

Slide 3



YES?!!! Great, let's get started!

- ◆ Where did these ideas come from?
 - Background and rationale
- ◆ The Basics
 - Personalization
 - Interest-based learning
 - Exhibitions
 - Communication
- ◆ Questions & Discussion

This is not a HOW TO by any means. These are ideas, theories and examples of things that I have experienced in the past 2 years. Please ask questions as we go, but realize that I do not have all the answers.



Where did these ideas
come from?

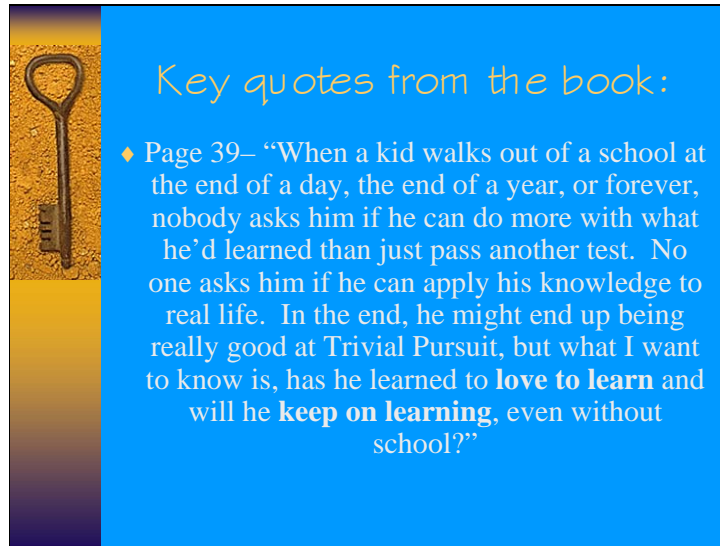
- ◆ The Big Picture:
Education is
Everyone's Business
by Dennis Littky
 - A detailed description
of how the Met School
runs
 - Scenarios and student
samples

Dennis Littky
with Samantha Grubbs

THE BIG PICTURE
Education is Everyone's Business

My first exposure to this school was when this book arrived in my mailbox from The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. I read it cover to cover in a very short time. It was absolutely fascinating to me that this school had a diverse struggling population, but still managed to motivate the students to produce high-quality work, and do extremely well on all their tests. They boasted a 100% acceptance rate to college every year they have been open! This really caught my interest. I think a lot of the reason it held my attention is because many of the beliefs of the staff at the Met School (Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center), which is a high school, are very similar to the beliefs of many elementary school teachers (i.e. small class size, personal attention, staying with your teacher all day, etc.).

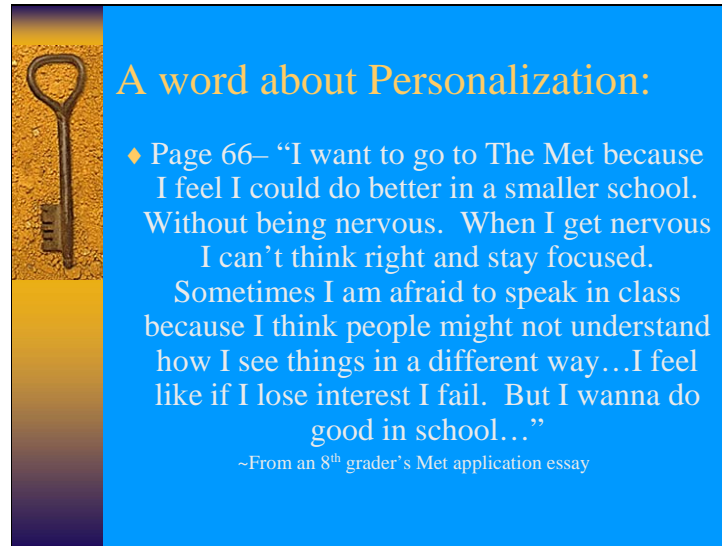
Slide 5



Key quotes from the book:

- ◆ Page 39– “When a kid walks out of a school at the end of a day, the end of a year, or forever, nobody asks him if he can do more with what he’d learned than just pass another test. No one asks him if he can apply his knowledge to real life. In the end, he might end up being really good at Trivial Pursuit, but what I want to know is, has he learned to **love to learn** and will he **keep on learning**, even without school?”

We know, as educators, that this is our goal, but what do we honestly do to achieve this? Giving tests and grades are a wonderful way to assess a student’s knowledge on a key subject, but how do we assess whether they love to learn? What steps have we REALLY taken to ensure that kids see why learning is important and exciting? This presentation should give you some ideas.

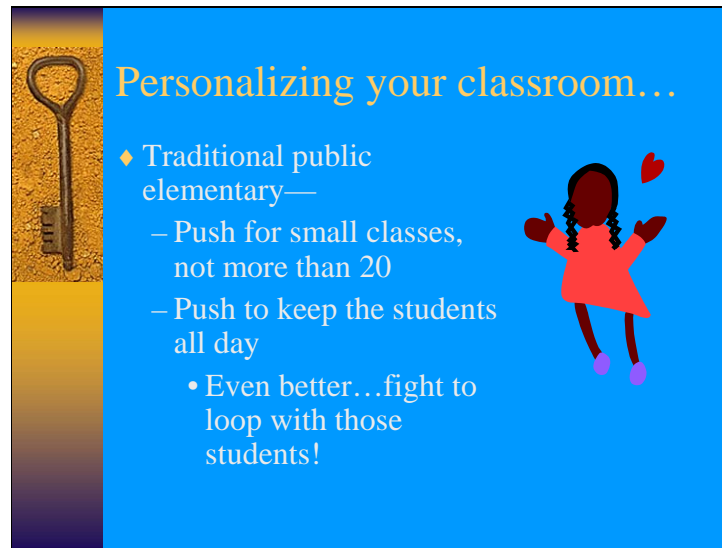


A word about Personalization:

- ◆ Page 66– “I want to go to The Met because I feel I could do better in a smaller school. Without being nervous. When I get nervous I can’t think right and stay focused. Sometimes I am afraid to speak in class because I think people might not understand how I see things in a different way...I feel like if I lose interest I fail. But I wanna do good in school...”

~From an 8th grader’s Met application essay

Because we are in schools everyday with kids, it is easy to lose sight of what matters. We get caught up in that one little stinker who just wasted 45 minutes of our time because he decided to graffiti the bathroom walls. We go home at night and complain to our spouses about all the bureaucracy and mean parents, the stacks of papers to correct and the low wages, but how often do we go home bursting at the seams over the accomplishment of one kid? How often do we spend our valuable time writing up a positive note to a parent rather than a behavior concern? We know that kids want to learn. We know that they are lovable and caring. We know this because that is why we entered this profession. So then, why are there kids who feel as this student did? With all the effort we put into our jobs, how do kids leave our classrooms feeling this way?



The slide features a blue background with a vertical yellow-to-purple gradient bar on the left. A large key is positioned vertically on the yellow part of the bar. The title 'Personalizing your classroom...' is written in yellow text at the top. Below the title, there is a list of bullet points in white text. To the right of the text is a cartoon illustration of a young girl with dark skin, wearing a red dress and purple shoes, holding a red heart.

Personalizing your classroom...

- ◆ Traditional public elementary—
 - Push for small classes, not more than 20
 - Push to keep the students all day
 - Even better...fight to loop with those students!

I am going to assume that most of you teach in a public school. If not, consider yourself lucky, because these practices will more than likely be even easier for you to implement. Public schools vary in their definition of an appropriate class size. Generally, primary grades have smaller numbers than intermediate. Our purpose today though is to talk about grades 3-5. Let your voice be heard about the benefits of small class sizes. Empower your parents to voice their thoughts on this subject as well. Also, in some intermediate level classrooms, the students move around from one teacher to the next. There are arguments for and against this practice. However, if you are a competent teacher in all areas, then having your students all day will be an excellent way to get to know their personal strengths and weaknesses. You will be able to connect your teaching to other discussions that happen throughout the day. You will have the opportunity to see each child thrive in some subjects and struggle through others. This is your opportunity to take that knowledge and use it to the child's advantage. If you have a child who excels

at writing, then maybe you should tailor her math projects so it incorporates more writing. This is your chance to show her that math is fun and she can be successful at it. If you succeed at having the students all day, the next best step to take is to find out if you could loop up to the next grade with those students. Imagine how much farther ahead you'll be if you are able to start the year with the same group of kids?! At the Met School, students stay with the same advisor for all four years of high school. They say that this helps particularly when something outside of the classroom is interfering with school. If a student is suddenly faced with a divorce or a death or has taken drugs that morning, the teacher who knows that child well will be the first to notice and talk with that student. The teacher becomes a second parent, which can only benefit the students. I know I have had students who are only ready in May to really open up and talk to me; this is too late.



Quality Time

- Have lunch with them often
- Play ball with them at recess
- Show them that you are there for them always, not just in the classroom

An additional way to personalize your classroom is to go out of your way to spend time with your students. This sounds like common sense, but we all get bogged down with paperwork and other things. We have to remember that while those kids are in the building, we need to take every opportunity presented to help them be successful. For me, that means eating lunch, in the lunch room with them and playing games with them on the playground. This puts me on “their turf” where I can let my guard down a bit and show them that I am human. I can look at them from another perspective too. I had a student this year who was not academically successful. Once I realized what an outstanding kickball player he was, and started acknowledging it in class, he seemed to try a bit harder in class too. I think he felt a bit validated; that he could do something right.



More Ways to Make School Special

- ◆ Send home notes often—positive, positive!!!!
- ◆ Write notes to students, not just their parents; they can read too!
- ◆ Invite students to come in for help before/after school

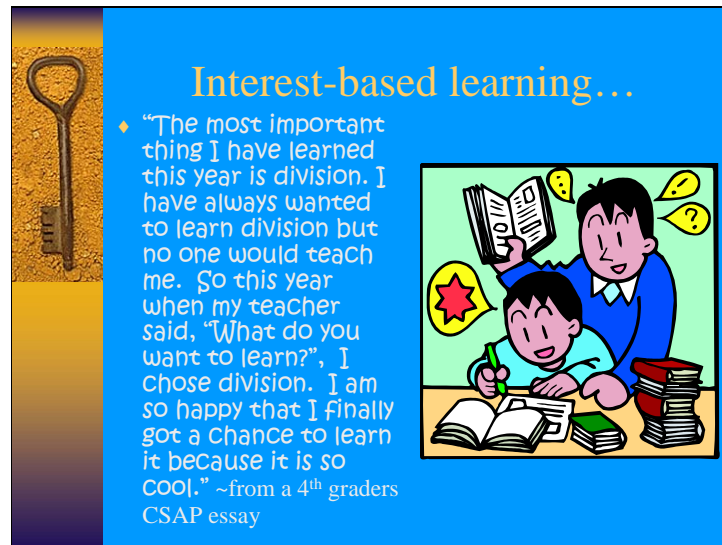
The slide features a vertical key icon on the left side. On the right, there is an illustration of a male teacher with glasses and a yellow shirt sitting at a desk with a female student, both looking at a computer screen.

Notes go home a lot in my classroom. Most of the time the kids think they are in trouble, because that is how they see school—as a punishment system. But, by the end of the year, most of my students love to get notes sent home because they are generally wonderful and positive. It makes their parents proud. Many kids these days don't get a lot of time with their parents, and parents, just like teachers, end up spending way too much time on the negative and not enough on the positive. Imagine if you only saw your parents for 1 hour before bed each night and the entire hour was spent determining your punishments or yelling at you? Many of our kids face this situation at home. Kids need to see that school is a great place to go and that their teacher sees the good in them, not just the bad.

Sometimes I just write a note to a student and leave it on their desk, or in a classroom mailbox, if I find the time to organize that system. Kids come in from recess


or in the morning and they see a colorful note on their desk...they are immediately excited and energized about school.

Inviting students to come in before or after school for extra help or just some time to talk is a great way to make a bond with kids. Sometimes as teachers of 3rd, 4th or 5th graders we think kids don't want to be around us anymore...that we aren't cool, but the opposite is actually true. I started a Thursday afternoon tutoring time last year. At first it was just for a really struggling kid and he hated it, but soon it became a coveted time and more and more kids wanted to be there. I had to start turning them away because it wasn't a small group anymore, it was my whole class!

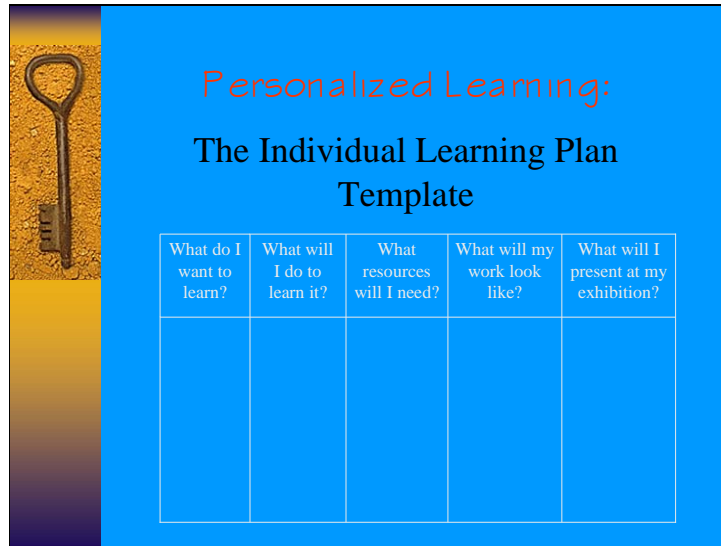


Interest-based learning...

- ♦ “The most important thing I have learned this year is division. I have always wanted to learn division but no one would teach me. So this year when my teacher said, “What do you want to learn?”, I chose division. I am so happy that I finally got a chance to learn it because it is so COOL.” ~from a 4th graders CSAP essay



This was written by one of my recent 4th graders. He is a quiet child who struggles a bit because of a language barrier. From day 1, he told me he wanted to be a scientist. He was super interested in math and science, even though he really struggled with math. First quarter I sat down with each student and put together an Individual Learning Plan for them. His interest was with math. He decided that he'd incorporate writing into his project by creating division story problems. He said that first he'd have to learn how to do division before he could write the problems. The greatest part of this student's project (besides this wonderful essay) is that he took this project home and presented it to his dad, who believed that this was something that the teacher mandated. The two of them worked together to accomplish this task. Meanwhile, it wasn't me who mandated it, it was the student who just NEEDED to learn about division.



Here is a template for an Individual Learning Plan. You could modify this to your own needs pretty easily, but I really felt breaking it down for elementary kids was essential. I started by asking them the big question, “what do you want to learn?” For children without many life experiences, this is tremendously difficult. You may need to give them some books or let them talk with other kids to get ideas. As it will turn out, they are so interested in so many things, they will have trouble focusing on just one. Question 2 was also difficult for elementary kids. The answer I always got was “I will read a book.” I had to really push to get them to come up with ideas like, going on a trip, interviewing someone, watching a video, listening to a CD, etc. Some students went crazy with question 3, listing everything down to the pencil. Sometimes the answer to this question had to come later, once they figured out what resources were available. Question 5 almost always had the word “poster” in it, until I started showing examples and giving ideas of other project formats. As time went on, and students saw other

projects, they got more creative. Finally, students were aware that at the end of the quarter, their work would be presented at an exhibition. This is where the students got to decide how much of their project they would show, or what other touches they'd add at their exhibition. I have had students include people, pets, food and figurines in their final exhibition.



How Does This Look in a Traditional Public School?

◆ Determine how much leeway you have...

So, public school puts a twist on this seemingly simple concept. We have standards to meet and principals to please and CSAP scores to achieve. However, if you remember that **good teaching is good teaching** no matter which FUN way you spin it, then interest-based learning works just fine. Just remember to have an objective for every lesson that ties to a standard, determine your assessment ahead of time, ask high-level questions and wrap-up the lesson with some accountability, and you'll be fine. I have given you some examples of project rubrics in your handouts. I have found that these have to be pretty generic because the students are all doing different things. By the way, if you are confused about that big word...DIFFERENTIATION...this is a great way to accomplish it. Differentiation is the whole premise of the Met's practices...ONE STUDENT AT A TIME. On the topic of leeway– you all know your administration best. Do some thinking about how you will have to spin this so that you stay out of trouble. Just remember that everything you do should be in the best interests of your students, so

be brave and jump in, but do it with your own students in mind. If something isn't working, change it. Next I will tell you about the different ways I tried this in my classroom. I changed things all the time to try to make it work the best for me.



Ways to organize this and keep your sanity!

- ◆ Find out your students' interests
- ◆ Choose a topic
 - As a class or individual

• **Content vs. strategy**

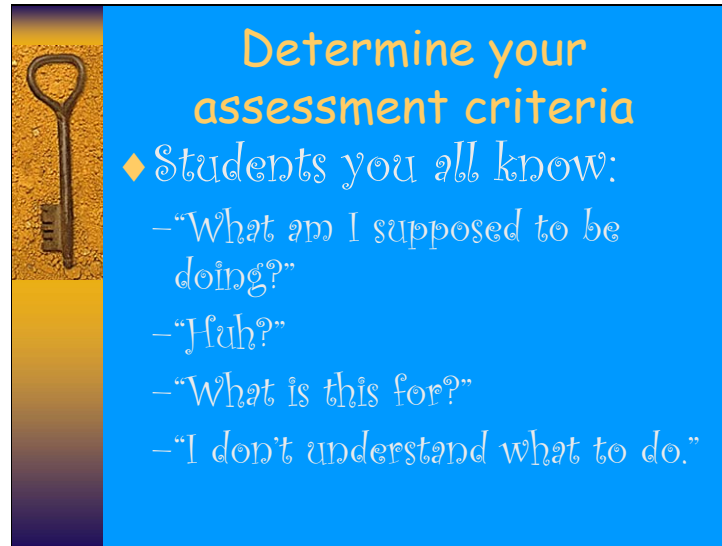
- **Science/Social Studies vs. Research Skills**

One way was to choose a content area topic—our first one was Australia/Oceania— and to tell the students they could study anything they wanted, but they had to prove why it was IMPORTANT to the country. You'd be absolutely amazed at what they came up with. I had a couple students study the Tasmanian devil. They discovered, through their own research, that the animal was important to Australia because it cleaned up road kill and preyed on crop eating rodents! So, these students took my requirements of topic, direction and project (they had to create a flag to represent their topic) and tailored it to meet their own needs for learning. She loved the project and begged to do more all year long. She learned research skills, writing skills and took her learning to a deeper level.

I also used this same model of a mandatory project (such as creating a flag) and a required written piece (such as a report, poster, brochure) and allowed the students to pick any topic under the sun. I had lots of kids choose animals, but I had one pair of boys

choose World War II. They broadened their horizons away from animals once they started to see what other kids were doing. I found that much of my job was to expose them to different topics.

Finally, I had the students choose their own projects, but they had to stay within my topic choice, which was “Earth Changing Forces.” As you can see, this was still a broad topic. This young 4th grader in the picture decided to create a poster showing the ways that earthquakes and volcanoes are related. I had a group of boys make a moving model of the Ring of Fire. There were a bunch of different projects including 2 models of tsunamis—complete with water and figurines.



Determine your assessment criteria

- ◆ Students you *all* know:
 - “What am I supposed to be doing?”
 - “Huh?”
 - “What is this for?”
 - “I don’t understand what to do.”

As always, when you are going to attempt to teach a new topic or unit to your students, you need to be very careful that you have determined your assessment criteria before you do any teaching. This is not always easy to do, but it is necessary to be sure that you are setting your students up for success.

Have you ever had your students ask these types of questions? Of course you have, unless you are super human, and in that case you don’t really need to be listening to me talk! Determining your assessment criteria ahead of time will help you with your planning of mini-lessons and deciding what types of questions to ask individual students so that the students know exactly what is expected of them and success is possible for every student.

The Met School does not talk about assessment much. For their purposes, assessment criteria are open-ended and determined in a very subjective way. This is possible for them because they are so in tune with every kid in their group and they have

worked with surrounding colleges and universities to accept their narrative reports in lieu of traditional grades. However, they have set up some benchmark hurdles for students to achieve before they pass to the next year.

In a traditional elementary school, I don't feel that you will be able to "get away" with what the Met School has set up. You will need to be able to show a certain set of criteria that each student will need to master through their interest-based work in order to prove that you are meeting the state standards. Just realize that in order to make these practices work on an individual basis, standards will have to overlap and interweave with each other.

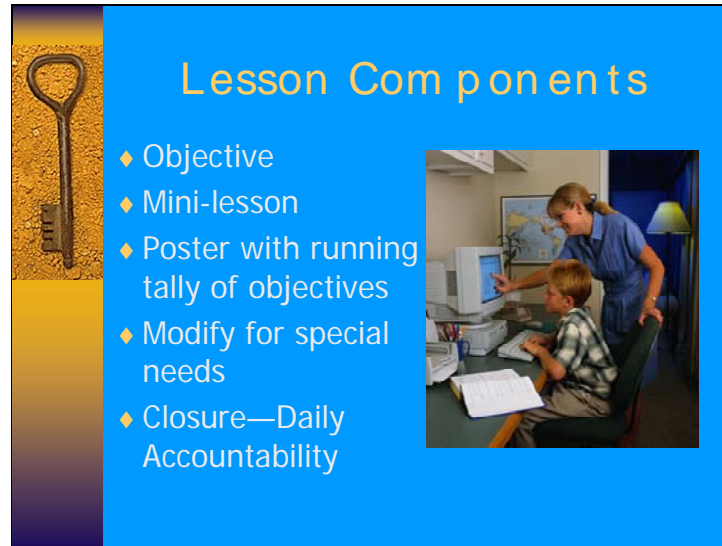
So take away with you today that you need to determine your assessment criteria, not so much for the purpose of the actual assessment, but more so you know exactly how to segment and sequence the learning and your expectations are very clear right from the start of the unit.



One huge lesson I have learned over the past 2 years of doing this in my classroom is that you have to have tons and tons of resources. Every student is going to need something different. Elementary schools generally have a good source of books and videos for the topics that pertain to the curriculum, but there aren't always a lot of resources for those intricate, obscure topics that your students will undoubtedly choose.

The last time we did this type of learning in my classroom, I was so well prepared. It was fantastic, but I have to warn you... to make this work, you have to remember what you thought about on that 2nd slide—are you willing to do things that are outside of your normal routine? Our topic was Earth Changing Events. I spent about a week on basic schema building. YES, these were whole group lessons. It was necessary or the kids wouldn't have had enough background knowledge to even know where to start. Then, I went to a website and found 20 different project starting questions on this subject. I presented these to my students and asked them to come up with their top 3

choices. I then assigned those topics to the students and provided them with all the resources I could possibly find on their topics. I even went to the local public library to find more resources. I went to websites and printed information. (This was a time saver.) Don't forget about your building media specialist here. She can be an extremely valuable resource for this step.



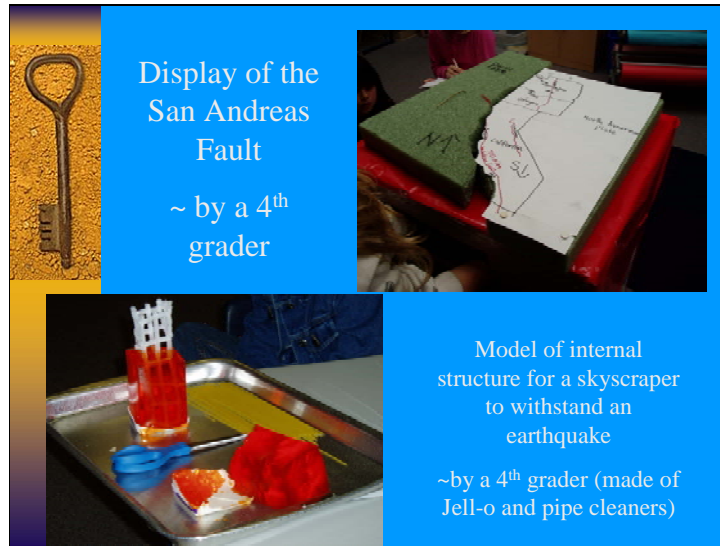
The slide features a blue background with a vertical yellow and purple gradient on the left side. On the left, there is an image of a key against a textured yellow background. The title 'Lesson Components' is written in yellow text at the top. Below the title is a list of five components, each preceded by a yellow diamond symbol. To the right of the list is a small inset photograph showing a female teacher in a blue shirt standing and pointing at a computer monitor, while a young male student in a plaid shirt sits at a desk looking at the screen.

Lesson Components

- ◆ Objective
- ◆ Mini-lesson
- ◆ Poster with running tally of objectives
- ◆ Modify for special needs
- ◆ Closure—Daily Accountability

My 4th graders still hadn't mastered the art of Googling something. Had my objective been more research based, then I wouldn't have done this step for them, but I was focused more on the science aspect of things this time. After the kids had their topics, I provided them with a rubric and set them up with a mini-lesson on scanning for key words (this was my objective for the lesson). Everyday I had a mini-lesson to help them with their research and development. These objectives went on a poster entitled, "Today I am working on..." This meant that every child could be working on something different, working at their own pace, and still meeting an objective that was tied to the standards. You do have to spend some time training your students to use the poster to guide their learning. So, if the principal comes in to evaluate your lesson and a child is asked what they are learning today, they can look up at the poster and say, "Well, I am on #1 still so I am working on scanning my information to find key words that are part of my project."

When kids are searching the library and the Internet for resources, it takes a while. If that is your objective, GREAT, but make sure you are really specific about teaching a technology lesson on how to determine which of the 20 websites your search engine just found is the best one for your topic. Searching and searching can be extremely frustrating for a lower achieving student and especially frustrating for a special education student. Don't make this part painful. Kids will check out on you if they get stuck here. This is definitely a part that has to be modified for elementary kids as opposed to the Met's high schoolers.



I thought you'd like to see some of the projects that my 4th graders came up with by the end of the year. The San Andreas Fault project was done by a highly motivated little girl. The Jell-o model was done by a group of struggling students after a presentation by a local structural engineer. (This was a great way to involve the community in our learning. Anytime I wasn't the expert—which was most of the time—I invited a local expert into our classroom to help out. This was really motivating to the kids and it gave them a glimpse of what real people in the real world did for a job everyday. What a great way to connect our learning to the real world and make things relevant!) Everyone in the school wanted to try to jiggle the Jell-o building to see if they could knock it over! This was SOOOOO fantastic to see my low achieving ELL (English Language Learners) be the talk of the school for once in their academic careers!



The EXHIBITION is the time at the end of each quarter, semester or year for students to reflect publicly on their own growth. This encompasses not only their academic growth, but also their growth as a member of the classroom. I have had my students talk about their growth in the areas of speaking in front of a group, and becoming a more independent learner. I also ask them to speak about their aspirations for the upcoming quarter or year. What do they still want to learn about or improve in?

The students are able to speak about their academic growth using their portfolio of work they have compiled. They do their own analysis of what they are proud of and what they are not so proud of.

One of the biggest benefits of the exhibition is the accountability it puts on each student. They have to get up in front of their peers, teachers, principal and often parents and speak about their efforts over time. Parents, teachers and the principal ask great questions of each student during the question/comment/suggestion/compliment session at

the end. But, the people who are the most diligent about holding each student accountable are the other students in the class. They will not let anyone get away with slacking off. Peer approval is the single most motivating force in my classroom. Believe me, knowing that people are going to ask you about your project and question its quality and your effort is a great way to motivate a student to put some real effort in. Generally, after the first quarter exhibitions, those students who are still slacking off in their work will turn around because they don't want to be put on the spot like that again.

I bet some of you are thinking that this could be really detrimental to a student's self-esteem. Well, I can tell you from my own experiences that from talking the students at the Met School in Providence, Rhode Island, that they really embrace the challenge. Kids get nervous, but that is normal and I tell them that. I tell them that I am nervous when I talk in front of a group. I also remind them daily that their performance each day is going to be remembered and they will hear about it at their exhibition whether the result is bad or good. In addition to holding those lazier students responsible, this process really validates all the hard work that your truly motivated kids put in each day. You know the ones who get really upset because they put in a ton of work on a project and all you had time to do was punish the kid who wasted all his time— never once praising that student who worked herself to death getting her project done.



Exhibitions Wrap it ALL UP!

- ◆ **Start out slowly!**
- ◆ **Connects to State Standards**
 - Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- ◆ **Create a rubric**
- ◆ **Expectations very clear**
- ◆ **Give them an outline**
- ◆ **MODEL**

Examples found in your handouts!

I can't tell you how important it is to start this whole process out slowly. But, particularly when it comes to making speeches for the Exhibitions, I have found that elementary students need some major guidance. I noticed when I went to the Met School and spoke with students that their view of exhibitions was similar to my own students' views except for one difference. The high school students at the Met were older and had a much larger vocabulary. Being high school students, their social lives required them to talk a lot, on the phone and at their after school jobs. This experience with talking and the outside world gave them the practice and motivation to use the exhibitions for interview practice. The staff at the Met, as well as employers in the Providence area told that the students who had gone through the Met School were much more comfortable at an interview and conducted themselves much more professionally than other candidates of the same age. It seems to me that this is exactly why states have put this skill into their standards. And although students are not held accountable for this standard on high-

stakes testing, they will benefit from it when they need to obtain a job or interview for a college scholarship.

When you are ready to begin exhibitions, begin by creating a rubric. Please realize that each quarter your rubric should raise the expectations. First quarter my rubric basically consisted of a check off system—Complete or Incomplete. By the end of the year, the rubric I used was a full page and extremely intricate. I didn't take any grades on the exhibition until after Christmas because the kids needed some time to get comfortable with this very new requirement.

Whatever you decide to put on your rubric, make sure that your REAL expectations are very clearly spelled out for the students. They probably have never ever done anything like this before and will need lots of modeling at first. If you want them to dress up a little, you have to say that because they don't know it is expected. If you expect them to use a visual display, you have to make that a requirement and tell them it explicitly. At first I gave my students an outline that they could just fill in the blanks. I pulled this away slowly as the year went on. Continually model, or you could even video tape some of the exhibitions and show them as the year progresses to have the students do some self-assessment and peer-assessment. And if you hang on to these photos or video tapes you can use them as models for upcoming years.



As you are probably beginning to see these practices that I have adapted from the Met School's model depend on each other. They cannot be effective alone. The big piece that I have not spoken about much is COMMUNICATION. To personalize your classroom you have to really communicate with your students and their parents. To create interest-based projects, you have to communicate with parents and students. Exhibitions are a chance for the student to communicate their thoughts to you, parents and peers. (The exhibitions are also a way to show people that what you are doing in your classroom is valuable!)

Let's talk a little bit about what you may be thinking right about now. This takes a lot of time. This will be a struggle and you just have to have that conversation with yourself as to what is really important to you or your students. I took a serious look at what made my students want to learn. The interest-based project was a huge motivation. It wasn't the research part, it was the actual making of the project. So, in the end, I had to

allow them to use school time to create the projects because otherwise they saw school as the boring place and home as the fun place where they go to work on their projects. This took tons of time, but I realized that the higher level thinking that was occurring during this time was so valuable that I was able to justify the time.



This is one of my young 4th graders. The first picture shows her doing her 1st quarter Exhibition speech. As you can see she has not mastered speaking to an audience yet. But, the second photo is the same student doing her 4th quarter Exhibition speech. She is dressed nicely, her hair is out of her eyes, she is looking at the audience and I believe she is holding note cards in her hands. (By the way, all of these speaking skills were things that I gave them feedback on throughout the year. I even showed them the pictures I took so they could analyze their posture. I also included all of these things in the rubric I used to grade them. Like I said, **MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CRYSTAL CLEAR!**) The poster she used for her visual each time was entitled “Proud of and Not Proud of.” This was debated by a couple of parents who thought it was going to hurt their child’s self-esteem. However, I wanted the kids to realize that getting a good or bad grade on something is **DIFFERENT** than whether or not you are proud of your work or not. I had many kids who got poor grades but put their work on the proud of side

because that was the best they had ever done! In the end, no one complained about anything we were doing.



The slide features a blue background with a vertical yellow and purple gradient bar on the left. On the yellow part of the bar is a large, dark metal key. To the right of the key, the title "From the parents' eyes..." is written in a yellow, serif font. A small, square portrait of a woman with dark hair is positioned to the right of the title. Below the title, there are two bullet points in a yellow font, each preceded by a diamond symbol. The first bullet point is from a parent application, and the second is from a Met parent.

From the parents' eyes...

- ◆ Page 137- " I have watched Jose tolerate school for eight years. He has bought the lie that school is to be tolerated to get to the fun stuff. I want him to experience the fun of learning." ~Met School parent application
- ◆ Page 138- "I greatly appreciate the staff at The Met's willingness to communicate about difficult issues that impact kids. They are hanging in through some big bumps in the road fur us as a family. I feel heard and supported. It is such a huge contrast from other schools my children have attended. Thank you so much!!!" ~from a Met parent

So if we believe that kids want to learn, what is holding us back? Often times I hear educators label the parents as the problem. They say that the parents don't help, they don't come to school for parent/teacher conferences, they just don't value school. And, although this may be true in some cases, after reading these accounts from Met School parents (the first one is Spanish speaking) there are obviously parents out there who are just begging for help. No parent is perfect, neither are the teachers, but we have to make an effort to meet in the middle. Working parents can't often come to a 3:30 meeting. If we truly want to involve parents, we need to go the extra mile to show them that we care. Meeting with a parent later in the evening is one way to show them that we respect their time. Then, maybe they will start to reciprocate and help their child at home to show that they value our time.

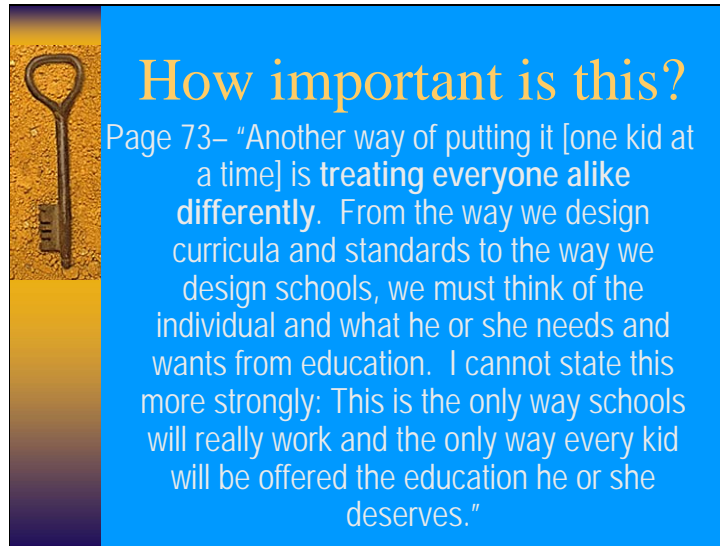


What do the parents think?



- ◆ “At the beginning of the year I had to help her with everything...she couldn't even use the Internet. But now, she has completed this entire project without one minute of help from me!” ~a 4th grade parent

To be completely honest with you, I had a lot of concerns coming from the parents at the beginning of the year. Thankfully, they were not voiced very loudly and they were stated in a way that let me know they knew this was a good thing, but it sure did take a lot of effort on everyone's part. This parent was totally frustrated at the start of the year. She was spending hours and hours with her daughter to get her project finished at home. As you can see, our hard work paid off. This is what we are aiming for— independent, motivated, life-long learners!

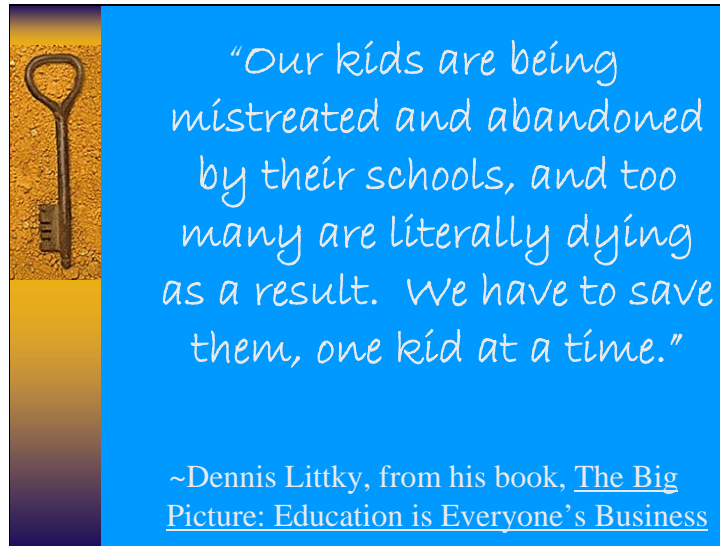


How important is this?

Page 73– “Another way of putting it [one kid at a time] is **treating everyone alike differently**. From the way we design curricula and standards to the way we design schools, we must think of the individual and what he or she needs and wants from education. I cannot state this more strongly: This is the only way schools will really work and the only way every kid will be offered the education he or she deserves.”

Doesn't every kid deserve the chance at an education? Isn't that what our federal government is telling us by creating the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001? Many of you may be thinking that this is not possible with the requirements placed on us as teachers to teach our students so they will do well on the high stakes tests. But let me tell you the results that they have had at the Met School.

- In 2004 the Met exceeded the No Child Left Behind goals set for Rhode Island in 2007!
- The Met's math scores jumped from a three-year average of 38 to 68, a 79% increase.
- On average, The Met had 18% more students proficient in math and 14% more students proficient in English/Language Arts than the three largest Providence high schools.



This is why we have to seriously think about changing the way we teach. Our system works for many kids, but it doesn't work for all of them. That just isn't fair. If there is a better way, we have to be brave enough to try. Good luck!

Chapter Summary

In chapter four this author gave an outline of the main practices from the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, Rhode Island. The main points covered were: (a) personalization, (b) interest-based learning, (c) exhibitions and (d) communication. Details from visits to the Met School and real-life examples from a fourth grade classroom were listed to help the reader understand how to implement these practices into a grade 3-5 classroom.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This project was designed to advise teachers of grades 3-5 on ways to implement the practices of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical School (The Met) into their own traditional classrooms. The Met School was created to provide an alternative education experience for high school students in Providence, Rhode Island. Its founders were concerned that students were not receiving the education that they deserved and therefore were dropping out of school. In the hope to improve dropout rates in their area, the founders developed a small, personalized school where interest-based learning and real-life projects are a daily occurrence. The practices that this researcher learned about through reading, observation, and personal communications have been the basis for this project. This chapter will discuss the contributions of the project, limitations of the project, and recommendations for future research and study.

This material was presented to a group of professional educators. One of the individuals reviewing this project is an inactive elementary school principal who is currently taking time off to complete her dissertation. Another educator reviewing this project has taught at a high school level for 15 years and is currently the director of the local Teacher Advancement Program, which is designed to improve the quality of education that is delivered in the classroom. The final reviewer of this project is a practicing middle school teacher. This group's comments have been used to determine how the project could be improved and its main strengths.

Contributions of the Project

The primary objective for this project was to create an in-service presentation that would inform teachers in grades 3-5 of ways they could use the practices of the Met School in their own classrooms. The reviewers of this project felt that it was well organized, and contained only the critical attributes needed to implement these practices. The group of experts who reviewed this project felt that the real life examples gave the project more credibility. Additionally, the experts noticed that the strategies suggested in the project were not new ideas, just a new ways to “improve current instructional practices.” These comments suggest that the project would be useful and easily understood by participants and would energize them to try some of these practices in their classrooms.

Limitations of the Project

The opinion of the researcher is that there were two major limitations to this project. The first one was a lack of literature on the subject. There are not many published pieces about this topic. The Met School has had two books published, only one of which is by an author with an objective viewpoint. There have been lots of magazine articles written about their practices and their successes, but none of these have been possible to use because they are not research based. The second limitation to this project is that the researcher does not feel she had sufficient time to test these ideas. Although nearly two years of actual classroom trials were used, that time was not consistent and it started out slowly. The second year was much more successful than the first.

The main suggestion for improvement that came from each of the three experts was to create a more in-depth introduction to the project. They felt that more set-up was needed to give the audience a better background of knowledge about the Met School's philosophy and rationale behind their practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

In recent years there has been a big push for teachers to follow a seemingly more prescribed method of teaching. With the pressure to get students to be proficient on the high-stakes testing, many teachers have begun to fear that the "art of teaching" is being lost. More research on the different models that teachers and schools are using to put the "art of teaching" back into classrooms would really help our students to be successful. Although there are many components to teaching that are a science, the part that teachers need help with is how to modify this science so it fits all students, because clearly, all students do not learn in the same way.

An additional avenue for research would be on the Met School itself. As this author has stated, there is very little published work about the Met School. There are currently three K-8 schools that have been inspired by the Met School. These would be topics for further study as well.

Project Summary

The purpose of this project was to develop an in-service presentation for educators of students in grades 3-5. This presentation was meant to give educators ideas for ways that they could implement the practices of the Met School into their traditional elementary classrooms without dismissing the requirements of their state or district. The project describes four main practices of the Met School that could be used to meet the

needs of students who are not achieving in a traditional classroom. The practices described and the real-life examples provided are meant for an entire class and could be described as a school reform effort.

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APPENDIX

Exhibition Speech Rubric Quarter 3

Circle one score for each part.

4	3	2	1	I have an opening sentence that tells my overall goal.
4	3	2	1	I have main points that explain why I have decided on this goal.
4	3	2	1	I explain how I will work to reach my goal. What will I do?
4	3	2	1	I have a conclusion that reminds the audience what I have said.
4	3	2	1	I tried my hardest and I was honest.

Exhibition Speech Rubric: For your Goal

Circle one score for each part.

4	3	2	1	I have an opening sentence that tells my overall theme.
4	3	2	1	I have 4 main points—some that I am proud of and some that I am not.
4	3	2	1	I support my 4 main points with details.
4	3	2	1	I have a conclusion that reminds the audience what I have said.
4	3	2	1	I tried my hardest and I was honest.

Exhibition Speech Model

Overall, this quarter, I feel like I have done fairly well with my learning. I can never complete everything I want to do, but I try very hard. I would like to tell you about my work at school, my graduate schoolwork and my work at home, as well as my exercising.

First, I am very proud of all that I have done with my students at school. They really seem to be learning and I hope that some of that is because of my work that I do with them each day. I also work hard at being a mentor for the other teachers. I get really frustrated sometimes, but each day is a new day, and I have to remember that. I hope that I can keep doing the quality work that I have done so far.

Next, I have to admit that although I get very good grades in graduate school, I probably could put more effort in. I tend to do my work at the last minute and have to scramble to get things done. This can get very stressful for me. Also, sometimes I take the easy way out and just find things on the Internet instead of really doing good research at the library. I will only be able to fix this if I work on getting things done earlier.

I am proud of my work at home because I feel like I do a good job keeping the house semi-clean and cooking healthy meals. I love to cook, so that part is easy, but the cleaning takes more effort. I hate doing the dishes, but I am really proud of how the kitchen looks when it is clean. I have to remember that feeling so I will be more motivated to do it every night.

I was doing really well with my exercising last year, but since school started this year, I have not done so well. I don't find the time to go to the gym, and I always make the excuse that it is too cold to run outside. Last year, I could run more than 3 miles, but now I am struggling with 2. I need to get back to the gym more often. I got an IPOD for Christmas, so I should be able to use that to motivate me to go to the gym and listen to some fun music. I LOVE MUSIC!

So, to wrap this up, I am mostly proud of what I do with my life and learning. I have some things to work on, but overall, it is going well.

Earth's Events Rubric—Quarter 4

	1- Unsatisfactory	2- Partially Proficient	3- Proficient	4- Advanced
Knowledge of the topic	Student is not able to clearly explain their topic. Student can't answer any questions. Student is extremely unsure of themselves.	Student is a bit shy and unsure of themselves, but able to explain their topic at a very basic level, can't really answer any questions from the audience Has cited at least 1 resource.	Student talks confidently about the topic, student knows the basic concepts of their topic. Has cited at least 2 resources.	All things from Proficient plus student is able to answer all questions from audience, including "what if..." style questions Has cited more than 2 resources.
Presentati on	Visual aid is extremely unclear, or there is no visual at all.	Student tried to make a visual aid but it is a bit hard to read and might have pages that have been printed from the Internet	Neat, colorful, large clear writing on visual (poster, etc)—enough info is on the visual, but not so much that it is cluttered.	All things from Proficient plus student has typed the words on the poster themselves and the visual aid could stand alone without any extra explanation.
Effort	The student has made little or no effort during the weeks that we worked on the project here at school. The student never came to ask for help. The student has little or no new learning about their topic because of their lack of effort.	Shows that the student has put some effort in, but may have waited too long to get started. Student never really came to get any help, and the information they have is unclear because of their lack of effort. The project lacks creativity.	Clearly shows that the student has worked on this for many weeks, and that they have asked for help when needed and made their best attempt to communicate the information clearly. The project is creative.	All things from Proficient plus student has come talk to me many times and shows a great deal of confidence because they have put so much time and thought into their project. The project is extremely creative and interesting to look at and learn about.

Final Discovery Project Rubric

10 points

- ❖ Visual display with pictures and writing
- ❖ New interesting information that that connects to other parts of the project and is written in your own words and is clear.
 - ❖ Student can clearly explain all their own work.
 - ❖ Neatly done with color
 - ❖ Nearly error free
- ❖ At least 2 resources are cited on the project.

7 points

- ❖ Visual display with pictures and writing
- ❖ Information seems random and does not connect to anything else. May have been copied. Student has trouble explaining their work.
 - ❖ A few errors.
 - ❖ Some sloppy parts.
- ❖ Only 1 resource has been cited on the project.

4 points

- ❖ Project is missing a visual or the written piece.
- ❖ Random information that has most likely been copied.
 - ❖ Student struggles to explain the project.
- ❖ Is not neatly done and may not have any color.
 - ❖ Many errors all over the project.
- ❖ No resources cited or they have been cited improperly.

You will be showing it at your FINAL EXHIBITION that will be happening in the last week of school (Monday and Tuesday). Please remember that this is the BIG PROJECT that you should have lots of experience putting together. You have completed 3 projects this year and we have talked a lot about what a GOOD project looks like. Neatness counts—but remember that you need to show that you have learned something new and interesting. It is not worth your time to do a project about something you already know everything about. Be prepared to tell us...

The most interesting thing I learned was...

The part I am most interested in continuing is...

This summer I hope to learn more about...

The hardest part about this last Discovery project was...

Final-- End of Year Exhibition Rubric!

Just about right-Nicely done.	Superior work—You Rock!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Looks nice ❖ Speaks loud enough ❖ talks some about growth over the entire year ❖ Tells about 4th quarter goals—what was it, did you reach it, why? or why not? ❖ Talks about their ability to speak in front of a group and how they have improved and why ❖ talk about what you have learned about yourself as a learner ❖ Has a poster that helps the audience follow along ❖ Includes a plan for how to improve over the summer ❖ Created an invitation for your parents and delivered it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Dressed up and confident ❖ Speaks “loud and proud” ❖ Tells about growth over the entire year ❖ Tells about 4th quarter goals—what was it, did you reach it, why? or why not? ❖ Talks about their ability to speak in front of a group and how they have improved and why ❖ Not only talk about your work, but also about what you have learned about learning—how to get help, how you work best, what motivates you ❖ Tells good things and isn’t afraid to admit things that need to be worked on ❖ Has a spectacular poster that helps the audience follow along—shows extra effort ❖ Includes a plan for what to do over the summer to improve and how you will make sure it really gets done! ❖ Created an invitation for all the people you want to invite and delivered it

_____ A positive card written for every single student in class.