



The Looking Glass

Making Green Our New School Color

Sarah Werthan Buttenwieser, Parent Group W & O

Here's the practical question that informs many accommodations to a greener lifestyle: how hard could it be to go a little greener? That's what second grade teacher Maggie Bittel asked when kids in her class wondered why they could recycle little yogurt containers at home but not at school.

"We started small," Bittel said. "We just recycled them in our class and found different families to take them at the end of the week. Then, I began to research what the college was willing to do." With the college's blessing and support from other classroom teachers, Bittel and fellow second grade teacher Robbie Murphy got some
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Storytelling in the Classroom: Imagine That!

Jennifer Jacobson, Parent Group L & W

Who doesn't like time travel? For the past several weeks in our house, it has been "the Year of Our Lord, 1775" rather than 2008. And the journey of James Lewis, Printer's Boy, has been carefully documented as part of Elizabeth Cooney's fifth grade unit on Colonial America. One night, as our hero James was tiptoeing into the tent of the Great General, George Washington, there came a knock at the door. Outside in the cold February night stood another fifth grader. He was in search of a moustache.

It turn out that Barry Wasdworth's class is getting so into science they are donning facial hair, wearing lab coats and costumes to rec-reate men and women who have contributed to the field of science. "Well," explained the boy attaching on the salt and pepper moustache to his upper lip, "What better way to understand how $E=MC^2$ than by telling the story of the guy who came up with the theory?"

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Two Goodbyes, With Many Thanks

Cathy Reid

At the end of this school year, two longtime Campus School staff members, Dick Gnatek and Charles Parham, will be retiring. Mr. Gnatek is completing his 37th year as a physical education teacher at the Campus School. He has helped hundreds of children aspire to physical fitness, achieve physical skills, learn good sportsmanship and gain confidence in their own abilities. An inveterate early riser, his daily early morning swims are well known to students past and present. Mr. Parham joined the Campus School staff as curriculum coordinator in 1989. His contributions have been essential to the evolution of the Campus School curriculum over nearly two decades. He has been involved in many of the activities and routines that keep the school going on a day-to-day basis, including, most visibly, ensuring safe crossing to and from school for cars and pedestrians by the "circle." I am very appreciative of both Mr. Gnatek's and Mr. Parham's many years of service to the school and wish them both well as they move on to a new phase in their lives.

Both Mr. Gnatek and Mr. Parham have interacted with hundreds of Campus School students and families over the years. Anyone who would like to send them a note of appreciation, share a memory, or wish them well in their retirements may do so via email (cparham@email.smitih.edu or rgnatek@email.smith.edu) or U.S. mail (Smith College Campus School, 33 Prospect Street, Smith College, Northampton, MA 01063).

Memories of a Teacher in the Field

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(Making Green Our New School Color, cont.)

blue recycling bins and handed over this school-wide recycling effort to the second grade. Murphy said, "This fits in with our hopes and dreams and our central questions for second grade: what is a naturalist, what is an activist and what is a conservationist?" Bittel added, "The kids are vigilant. This job also offers them an identity in school—the recyclers—and the chance to work on group skills, to do some big counting up of how many pieces we've recycled and to enjoy the adventure of traveling through the entire school."

Besides the green training and the group skills and the math practice, the second graders also get a chance to hone their critical thinking skills. For example, Bittel explained, "Recently, my kids noticed that the fifth grade doesn't have as much recycling to pick up as the kindergarteners. At first, they were mad at the fifth grade until it dawned on them that maybe the fifth grade already reduced and reused a lot more than the younger kids."

But second grade isn't the only year that thinking green occurs. Katherine First's first graders are constantly coming up with new ways to reuse items in art projects, even melting crayon bits together to make new, multi-



colored crayons. "I like to encourage the kids to think about how things can last or change in purpose. Once we get started, they are extremely inventive."

As the second grade adds yogurt containers, fifth grade teacher Elizabeth Cooney subtracts just one thing: extra copies. She says, "When I hand a piece of work out, I let the students know they must hold onto their papers carefully because I will not make extra copies due to their losing papers: one per person. Along with raising consciousness about using resources unnecessarily, this practice promotes personal responsibility."

In sixth grade, geography lends itself to heightened awareness of the environment. Lara Ramsey says, "For our regional study of the United States, we study the effects of climate change upon each region. The discoveries students make about climate change leads to grassroots action, almost inevitably. We use Earth Day as an opportunity to share our newfound knowledge and our concern about climate change."

Seeing how nearly every class has its own green story, regardless of SCCS' traditional colors, it's safe to say that green must be added as our new honorary hue.



(Storytelling in the Classroom: Imagine That!, cont.)

Travel into other grades and more mysteries are afoot. An article in the Daily Hampshire Gazette reported that sixth graders had taken to visiting classrooms as historic African American personages. A fourth grader disclosed that Harriet Tubman even sat at her desk.

So, what's the story behind these stories? To get to the heart of the matter, I turned to Gina Cowley. Who better to clarify a mystery than a first grade teacher? She explained that for the last year the school's "professional learning community" has been studying Keiran Egan, an educational theorist from Canada's Simon Fraser University. Howard Gardner, the multiple intelligence guru, describes Egan as "one of the most original, penetrating, and capacious minds in education today." Egan's work includes *Teaching and learning outside the box: Inspiring imagination across the curriculum*, *Teaching literacy: Engaging the Imagination of New Readers and Writers*, and *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching*.

According to Egan, "Story is one of the most powerful cognitive tools students have available for imaginatively engaging with knowledge." A 1994 research study, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*, confirms that the brain is wired to organize, retain and access information through story because the "story form is a natural brain process." Thus, "teaching through story means that students will be able to remember what is taught, access the information and apply it. Story aids memory because it puts information into a meaningful context. Storytelling lays down the narrative or contextual track where knowledge can reside... [maintaining] connections between isolated pieces of information. [Furthermore,] story puts information into an emotional context, and research indicates that emotions play an essential role both in memory and motivation."¹

To explain how Egan's theories take shape in her classroom, Ms. Cowley introduced me to Sophie. All the kids in Group H know her. She likes to put "big ideas into small packages." She's "a sponge and notices the beauty in everyday objects. She keeps metaphor and repetition in her writer's tool kit and pulls them out when she wants to write poetry."

So, who is this wunderkind anyway? Sophie is a fictional character featured in two Group H publications, one about poetry and the other, math. These kid-friendly books appear in large print on 8 1/2 x 11" laminated construction paper. They are illustrated in magic marker by first graders and bound together with yarn. The "Sophie Stories give students a macro view or 'meta-narrative' of what we will study along with specifics skills to practice,"

Ms. Cowley explains. "They provide an emotional connection to the lesson so kids feel linked to and invested in the material."

How do teachers know if students really care about this material, or if these theories about the importance of story play out in our kids' lives? Ms. Cowley confirmed that fifteen out of twenty students were motivated to bring *The Poetry Story* home to read not just once but over and over again. One first grader told me, "I like it because of all the things that Sophie is thinking about." Another child without front teeth advised, "Sophie tells us that anyone can be a poet, if they are brave enough."

And then there's the evidence on my kitchen counter. It appeared in the form of a response paragraph that Jake (a.k.a. James Lewis Printer's Boy) had written about the fifth grade unit on Colonial America. I use it here with his permission:

The whole experience was intriguing. At first, when we started the unit, I thought, "Oh wow. This is going to be sooo boring." But it turned out I was wrong. Actually, it was nothing like that. I had tons of fun writing the rough drafts, dipping the covers in tea, and making up the story. Altogether, I thought it as one of the best units of the year. I wish I could build a time machine and transport myself back in time to do it all over again.

Leaning against the counter textured with breakfast crumbs, I started to imagine my own time travel machine; one that would zoom me to a time when educators nationwide—not just at the Campus School—are encouraged (dare I say trained?) to use imaginative approaches to teaching. When storytelling is not considered quaint or frivolous but where it flourishes and children are inspired because they are emotionally attached to what they learn in language arts, science, math, and social studies. In this future time teachers know that storytelling involves all parts of the child as well as every child sitting in the learning circle. In this future time, through stories, no child is ever left behind.

Jennifer Jacobson is a school parent and Founder of When Children Save the Day, a program uniting storytelling and community action.

¹ Norfolk, Sherry, Jane Stenson, and Diane Williams. *The Storytelling Classroom: Applications Across the Curriculum*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2006.

Memories of a Teacher in the Field

Robert Green, Graduate SCCS 1980

I've probably played in a thousand soccer games over the course of my life. I've played in LA, Chicago, Mexico, Canada, the UK and other and further flung places. But none of the memories I've accumulated in all those games will ever drive my fondest soccer moments from my head: the days kicking a ball for Mr. Gnatek on a small field in front of the Davis Center. It was there, with Mr. Gnatek's guidance and support, that I learned that slipping past a

defender and cracking a shot into the upper corner of the net was one of life's great pleasures. I am forever in his debt.

How many other shots into upper corners, passes and tackles and on and on can be traced back to that field and that man? It's possible that Mr. Gnatek's teaching DNA has propagated onto tens of thousands of fields and thousands of goals around the world. And while I'm sorry to hear he's finally packing it in, I think that's one hell of a legacy.

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