

CHAPTER ONE

The Premise

Necessity is the mother of taking chances.

—Mark Twain (1872)

WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK?

As educators with more than 60 years of experience among us, we enjoy seeing and working with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and all the other people who help to make a school what it is. We have taught, consulted with schools, and made workshop presentations; and two of us served for many years as elementary principals. We also delight in the various subjects and in watching, helping, and encouraging students to learn.

This book examines many of the best practices and methods for each curricular area as established in national norms. Some of our suggestions are similar to those made by well-informed educators 40 years ago, but many are based on practices that emerged in the last 20 years and have worked in hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of classrooms across the country.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

This book is designed primarily for teachers and administrators of students in kindergarten through Grade 6 who wish to examine where they are and where they might go. The format allows educators to use single chapters to concentrate on a particular

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subject area or to use the entire book as a professional-development tool that can renew, reenergize, and reinvigorate teaching practices for individuals or for a school's faculty as a whole.

We focus on all the major content areas in an elementary school: the strands of language and their relationship to language development and critical thinking, mathematics, science, social studies, technology, the library media center, and the arts (which include movement and physical education). We address professional growth and the need to keep teachers' curiosity alive despite pressing schedules and responsibilities. We acknowledge the difficulties faced daily by many teachers, working under circumstances where schools are understaffed and underserved; but rather than offering still another analysis of school reform and governance, we choose instead to focus on instructional strengths such as the dynamic that emerges when thoughtful and curious teachers guide attentive and curious students.

In our current work as consultants, we sometimes encounter teachers who don't enjoy students as much as they once did, administrators who have diminished appreciation for their teachers, and parents who are either confused by the system or who hold educators in low regard. Teachers and administrators frequently feel their jobs and self-esteem are threatened by an accountability system which seems to hold them responsible for all the woes of the world; and some parents disapprove of classrooms which are unlike those in which they grew up and of a system which seems not to be doing enough for their children.

We accept that schools must be accountable but not that accountability requires us to relinquish those practices that make teaching enjoyable and creative and make learning enjoyable and continuous. No accountability system should work against serious learning and genuine enthusiasm for teaching and learning. The wonderful thing about effective teaching based on what really works for teachers and students is that both enthusiasm for school and test scores rise.

HOW IS THE BOOK DESIGNED?

Standards

National standards are the foundation for textbooks and local mandates. It is an impossible task to track or address all of these

separately as they multiply and change, district by district, state by state, across educational communities. However, the use of national standards provides a consistent framework for each of the content areas, and examples throughout this book demonstrate practical applications of those norms in the elementary classroom.

Curriculum

In each chapter, we discuss the elements of a good program for the area under consideration. We provide real examples from real schools with ideas that work, along with our reflections regarding these examples, and assessment tips. Finally, we provide a list of resources that may be used by the classroom teacher. Again, readers will find some of the material quite familiar and some new. What is original is that educators now have one clear handbook that covers virtually all the curricular areas in Grades K-6.

Creative Teaching

We intend for this work to be used as a guide for the elementary classroom teacher, K-6, although we know that many of the concepts and practices work well in grades beyond. We believe that both new and seasoned professionals will find themselves capable of the practices discussed and described; and we think that such methods will spark the flame of learning.

RESOURCE

Twain, Mark. (1872) *Roughing It*. Retrieved July 27, 2002, from www.twainquotes.com/Necessity.html