

# FingerPoints

JANUARY 2008 EDITION

E-Newsletter for *Teaching Is Too Important to Take Seriously*

## Welcoming in the New...

...Again!

Doesn't that describe the new year? It's a chance to start new again. For some of us, this seems like *deja' vu* (all over again.) In fact, this writing may seem familiar, because the first lines are the same as last year. As we all know from our teaching experiences, if something works go with it.

However, I'm not going to talk about anything new right now, that comes in a later section. Nor am I going to talk about the new resolutions we are all making, that will also come in a later section. What I am going to talk about is expectations. Specifically, expectations of ourselves.

I'm sure all of us know about the research that shows when we have high expectations for our students, they tend to rise to those expectations. My question is about our expectations for ourselves is not are they high, but are they realistic? Maybe it should be said, are we realistic about what we expect of ourselves.

I thought of this because I was thinking about New Year's resolutions, and I thought of a friend who made a resolution a few years ago to lose weight. I ran into the friend during the summer after he had made this resolution, and it was obvious he was one of the few people that actu-

ally kept his resolution.

I asked how much he had lost, and acting upset he said that he only lost 20 pounds. I asked him why he was upset, and he said it was because he had resolved to lose 30, but only lost 20. As a person who could stand to lose 30 + 20, I stared at him in astonishment.

I think of this story often when I am teaching, especially after state test scores come out. I feel disappointed when I don't have 100% of my students pass, and feel I haven't done a good job. However, it's not that I didn't do a good job, I did. It is my expectations. In this instance they aren't realistic.

In 2008 be aware of your expectations and don't let that get in the way of seeing all the great things you are accomplishing. In the same way with my friend losing weight, where he couldn't see the great things he had done because his expectations got in the way, we do that in our teaching.

Remember, we are making a difference. Just give yourself the expectation to see it.

Have a Good Day,  
Scott Endres

## The Finger of the Month - #1 Laughter is Good

A quick reminder as we start a new year, and a long stretch to spring break, that laughter is good.

Okay, that probably isn't enough to convince you, so let me give you some more. I am continually reading articles about the positive effects of laughter and humor, and over the past year there has been a lot of stories about the work of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and St. Olav's Hospital in Norway.

To summarize, they published a study indicating a correlation between sense of hu-

mor and mortality rates in patients with severe diseases. After studying 54,000 kidney impaired patients over a seven year period, it was shown that patients scoring relatively high on sense of humor reduced their risk of dying within 2 years by 30%. According to research results, no other patient characteristic could predict life or death within two years as strongly as the score for a sense of humor.

What does this mean for us in teaching? Well, doesn't teaching sometimes make you feel like you are close to death? So go ahead and laugh...and survive.

## Resolution for 2008 - H.A.Y 360

Okay, now is the time to make a resolution. I bet you are saying that they don't work, and in most cases that is true. However, sometimes they do work. In fact, I made a resolution last year that I was able to keep. Last year, I resolved to give up soft drinks in general, and specifically, Diet Coke. After two weeks of headaches last January, other than one Diet Coke in Western Kentucky when I lost my voice during a presentation, I held to the resolution and haven't had any in a year. (However, don't ask me how much iced tea I have had in the past year.)

Resolutions are much like we talked about in the opening section, they are clouded by our expectations. If we have unrealistic expectations, then the resolutions will fail. But if we make a resolution that is possible, then we can achieve it. So, if you haven't made a resolution yet, or if you have already broken the one you made and are looking for a new one, then you are in luck. I have a simple one for you and it's the resolution I am making this year. It's H.A.Y. 360.

Some background on H.A.Y 360. I have a bad habit of being a little too involved in what I am doing, and not paying enough attention to the people around me. I have found myself numerous times in a conversation, where the person I am talking to asks about something I am doing, but I never ask about them. That is why my resolution is to ask at least one person each day, "How are you?" (H.A.Y) Now I am going to be realistic. It is going to be difficult to ask someone EVERY day this year, so that is why it is 360. I am going to give myself 6 days where I forget to ask (Also so maybe the TV show Anderson Cooper 360 will pick up the story.)

It is very easy for everyone to get too wrapped up in what we are doing, and this is especially true in education. We work in a profession where it is hard for us to feel respected in the outside world, and any chance we get to tell others about our successes, we take. However, it is very easy to forget about others. That is the idea about H.A.Y. 360. It forces us to ask other people how they are doing. For some professions where you don't interact with a lot of people, this could be difficult and irritating, but we in education have the best situation to ask "How Are You?" All we have to do is ask it of one student a day. If we ask one student each day how they are doing, think how that could change your school.

Before we go, there is one thing about H.A.Y 360 we need to talk about. It is that truthfully, there are probably more than a few people that we don't want to know how they are doing. But think for a second how it feels when someone asks you how you are doing? It makes a difference. And making a difference is worth the few minutes we might have to hear about someone's in-grown boil. Now, I don't know if there is such a thing as an in-grown boil, but I'm sure that is what some one told me once when I asked how they were doing. Remember, H.A.Y. 360 is about asking. No one said you had to listen.

## The T.S Moment of the Month

The Teaching Sucks moment of the month is very simple this month. It is politics in education. Since I became a teacher, education has become a political ball where everyone points out what is wrong, but no one knows how to fix it. Whether it is No Child Left Behind, which recent studies like the one from the Cato Institute that show NCLB has not done what it was intended, and possibly left our schools further behind, to anyone who makes a decision for schools based on what is best for them and not because of what is best for the students, politics has come closer and closer to destroying our schools, and our hard work. Politics in education is one of the reasons teaching sucks.

Okay, rant over. Remember to write down your reasons teaching sucks, then wad them up and throw them away. Now, let's get back working with the people that matter.

## New for 2008 - *Imagin*Education

If you could imagine your vision of what education looks like, what would you imagine. Take a second and think about it. What would education look like? What would your philosophy be? What would your educational theory be?

Imagining what education would look like if you could create your own theory is something you may have thought about before, but rarely do we get a chance to put it into words and practice. That is what *Imagin*Education is for me. Over the last several years, I spent numerous hours creating an education philosophy that fits what we need in education, while being research based. While most of those hours were spent studying education research, I spent countless more hours perfecting the theory in classrooms. In the end, *Imagin*Education is a philosophy of using the best of what we know about education in a setting that allows us to meet the simultaneous demands of NCLB and providing students with the skills needed to excel in a world economy.

So what is *Imagin*Education? Well, over the next several months I will use this space to explain the philosophy. However, this month I want to tell you a story about learning to play basketball (Hey, I'm from Indiana. What do you expect?) that gives you an idea of why we need *Imagin*Education, and what it can do.

*Let's say you are learning to play basketball. If you learned the NCLB way, you would have a goal of say, making 7 out of 10 free throws. With this goal, you could practice free throws all the time. Think for a second how motivated you would be to shoot 1000 free throws before you took your test. I'm going to assume not very much. But you practice anyway, because that is what is expected. In truth, you don't really know why you are practicing free throws because you have never really had a chance to play a basketball game. You have learned some other basketball skills in past grades, like dribbling and passing, but you have never played a game to understand why these skills are important. The only reason they are important is because someone told you they were important. Also you have been told that you will be tested on it, and if you fail then "bad things" will happen to you. You don't really understand what those bad things are, but you know they are going to happen.*

*Move ahead to test day. You are very nervous, but you have practiced, and in the end you hit 8 out of 10 free throws. You pass. Now that you have passed this test, you move on to the next grade where you get to learn a new basketball skill. By the way, several students that didn't pass the free throw test, but still get moved on to the next grade. You never see that bad thing happen to them.*

*Let's move years down the road. You have graduated and are in college. While wasting time in your dorm room, someone yells down the hall asking if anyone wants to take a study break and go play basketball. You think, yeah. That sounds like a good idea. You don't want to study, and a break would be nice. Also, you think, you know how to play basketball because you learned all the skills in school. You learned to dribble, pass, rebound, to shoot free throws and three pointers. You think about how you spent hour after hour practicing each of these boring skills for the tests, and how it would be nice to use them to play a game. So you*

*decide to go play.*

*Quickly, you realize that you have no clue on how to play the game of basketball. You realize that it is one thing to learn the skills, but it is another thing to use them in a game. You know how to dribble up and down the court and around cones, but how do you dribble around a defender that keeps moving. You think, "I didn't learn the skill to do that."*

*After a while, you start to get in the flow of the game. You're still not any good, but you start realizing that you need to take these skills you learned and use them in a new way, to create something new that you hadn't ever done before. You still need your skills, but you have to use them creatively and apply them to new situations. Another thing you realize is that basketball practice would be a lot more interesting when you understand why you need to learn a skill. At the end, after your team wins a game by hitting two free throws, you realize that all those hours practicing free throws would have been a lot easier had you known how they could help you win. Finally, you also realize you would have been a lot more motivated to practice had you been able to experience how important the skills you were learning.*

This is *Imagin*Education is designed to do. Take the skills and content that need to be learned, but placing them in a situation where students are motivated because they are involved in the story, and use their natural imagination to go beyond the basics, to create new applications of the material.

## These are the Days of Our Lives

January is a busy as you can see by all the "official" holidays this month and there are even new ones for 2008. As always, these are real holidays celebrated by someone, somewhere. So just celebrate!

### 2008

International Year of Languages  
International Year of the Potato

International Year of Planet Earth  
International Year of Sanitation

### Month

Book Blitz Month  
California Dried Plum Digestive Month  
Coffee Gourmet International Month  
Financial Wellness Month  
International Creativity Month  
International Wayfinding Month  
National Be On Purpose Month  
National Get Organized Month  
National Lose Weight, Feel Great Month  
National Mentoring Month  
National Volunteer Blood Donor Month  
Resolve to Eat Breakfast Month  
National Personal Self-Defense Awareness Month

Birth Defects Month  
Celebration of Life Month  
Family Fit Lifestyle Month  
International Change Your Stars Month  
International Quality of Life Month  
International Wealth Mentality Month  
National Clean Up Your Computer Month  
National Hot Tea Month  
National Mail Order Gardening Month  
National Radon Month  
Oatmeal Month  
Thyroid Awareness Month

### Weeks

1-7 Diet Resolution Week  
1-7 Nat. Lose Weight/Feel Great Week  
1-7 Women's Self Empowerment Week  
7-11 Nat. Thank Your Customers Week  
11-17 Cuckoo Dancing Week  
11-17 Home Safety and Security Week  
20-26 Healthy Weight Week  
20-26 Nat. Handwriting Analysis Week  
21-25 No Name Calling Week  
26-2/2 National Cowboy Poetry Gathering Week  
27-2/2 Catholic Schools Week  
31-2/4 Groundhog Days

1-7 New Year's Resolution Week  
1-7 Silent Record Week  
2-5 Someday We'll Laugh About This Week  
9-12 National No Tillage Week  
13-19 International Printing Week  
17-27 Sundance Film Festival Week  
20-26 Hunt for Happiness Week  
20-26 Nat. Take Back Your Time Week  
24-30 World Leprosy Week

The Days of Our Lives are Continued on the Next Page.

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## These are the Days of Our Lives...Continued

As always, these are real holidays celebrated by someone, somewhere. So just celebrate!

### Days

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Z Day  | 2 Happy Mew Year for Cats Day         |
| 2 55 mph Speed Limit Day                       | 2 Earth at Perihelion                 |
| 3 Nat. Chocolate Covered Cherry Day            | 3 Tolkien Day                         |
| 4 Dimpled Chad Day                             | 4 Trivia Day                          |
| 4 World Braille Day                            | 5 Bird Day                            |
| 5 National Second Hand Wardrobe Day            | 5 Epiphany or Twelfth Night           |
| 5 Fruitcake Toss Day                           | 7 Thank God It's Monday Day           |
| 8 National English Toffee Day                  | 8 National Joy Germ Day               |
| 8 Show and Tell Day at Work                    | 10 National Cut Your Energy Costs Day |
| 12 Penguin Awareness Day                       | 14 National Clean Off Your Desk Day   |
| 14 Organize Your Home Day                      | 14 Ratification day                   |
| 15 Champion of the Month Day                   | 15 Humanitarian Day                   |
| 16 Appreciate a Dragon Day                     | 16 Nothing Day                        |
| 16 Religious Freedom Day                       | 17 Customer Service Day               |
| 17 Judgment Day                                | 17 Get to Know Your Customers Day     |
| 18 Pooh (Winnie the) Day                       | 20 National Disc Jockey Day           |
| 20 Eagle Day                                   | 20 Inauguration Day                   |
| 20 World Religion Day                          | 21 Martin Luther King Day             |
| 21 National Hugging Day                        | 21 Squirrel Appreciation Day          |
| 22 Answer Your Cats' Questions Day             | 22 Celebration of Life Day            |
| 22 International Day of Radiant Peace          | 22 National Speak Up and Succeed Day  |
| 22 Rid the World of Fad Diets and Gimmicks Day |                                       |
| 22 Tub'shvat                                   | 23 National Handwriting Day           |
| 23 National Pie Day                            | 23 Snowplow Mailbox Hockey Day        |
| 24 Belly Laugh Day                             | 24 National Compliment Day            |
| 24 Women in Blue Jeans Day                     | 24 Women's Healthy Weight Day         |
| 25 A Room of One's Own Day                     | 25 Fun at Work Day                    |
| 26 National Peanut Brittle Day                 | 26 National Seed Swap Day             |
| 26 Toad Hollow Day of Encouragement            | 27 Holocaust Memorial Day             |
| 27 Thomas Crapper Day                          | 28 Better Business Communication Day  |
| 28 Bubble Wrap Appreciation Day                | 29 Freethinkers Day                   |
| 29 World Leprosy Day                           | 30 Inane Answering Message Day        |
| 30 National Write to Congress Day              | 31 Inspire Your Heart with Art Day    |

Don't forget....

January 21st is  
**Squirrel Appreciation Day**

If you don't appreciate them then,  
when will you?

