

FingerPoints

FEBRUARY 2008 EDITION

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

February the Longest Short Month on the Calendar

We are in the middle of it now. What, you ask? We are in the doldrums of the teaching year. That is why I call February the Longest Short Month of the Year.

This time of year is tough. February is too long from Winter Break to remember it, and not near enough to Spring Break to give us any hope. It is a month when the days seem longer and the kids seem wilder. Add to this the weather and it gets even more depressing.

Well, what do we do? I don't know.

Or at least I didn't know until this morning. What showed me the light? It was a cold, drenching rain, early on a gloomy, gray February morning. Now for the explanation.

A few months ago I started a committee of one that would meet the buses most every morning, no matter what the weather is, and say "Good Morning!" to as many students as possible. Is this something that I was required to do? No, it is something I wanted to do because, after doing my required bus duty the first month of the year, I could see a difference with the students when they had someone greeting them in the morning. I sort of figured that this would be a prime example of practicing what I preach. If I'm not willing to be out there and try to change things, then how could I expect anyone else to do it. So it ends up being something I want to do.

However, I didn't want to do it this morning. As I was walking to the doors, I heard the

pounding of a lovely winter rain storm breaking loose right as the buses let the kids off. Ahhhh, I love the smell of wet middle schoolers in the morning!

As I walked to the door, I thought today I might just wait inside and say good morning, but that just didn't seem right. So, without my umbrella, but with a rain jacket, I went outside to greet the students fully expecting to hear every little complaint about how horrible it was to come to school today. And I did hear that, for a while.

After a few minutes though, the mood changed. You know how it is when you get yourself in a silly situation and all you can do is laugh. Well, that is what the kids and I did this morning. We were wet. We were cold. And we were miserable. But we were all just started laughing and having fun with it. We splashed in puddles because we were going to be wet anyway, and we laughed about what a great day it was, some place else.

The key was that we made the best of the bad situation. This is also true with February. Yes, this time of year is bad, but at the same time it is only as good as we make it. So go out and do something to make it through February.

Have a Good Day,
Scott Endres

#4 - Allow Yourself to Laugh

Teaching is life and life is teaching. The more I work in this profession, the more I believe that. When I first started teaching, I felt that teaching was a different world, but I now know that isn't true. What that means is that we can learn a lot about education, from the world outside and this month that world is Brett Favre.

If you don't know, Brett Favre is the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers and he is old. Well, not old in a real way (i.e. he is a lot younger

than me), but he is very old in a football way. He is a gray haired guy, playing a kid's game.

So what can we learn from Brett? We can learn what the 4th finger of the 5 fingers says, Allow Yourself to Laugh. He reminded me of this when he started throwing snowballs at his teammates DURING a playoff game a few weeks ago.

Yes, he is a professional, as are we. He is successful, as are we. And he allows himself to laugh, as should we.



HAY 360 Scoreboard - 30 to 0

If you remember from the January FingerPoints, my resolution for 2008 is to accomplish HAY 360. If you don't remember what HAY 360 is, then we can assume you haven't been joining in with the rest of us. HAY 360 is the goal of asking, "How Are You?" of at least one person each day for 360 of the 366 days this year. So far, I have made it 30 out of 30 days. Granted some days have been tougher than others, and I'm sure my son is very tired of getting asked that question, but I have been able to do it.

How about you? How are you doing? I ask the second question because I want to make something clear. HAY 360 is not HAYD 360. It is not asking "How are you doing?" This question is common question we all get, and we generally have set answers for it. Stuff like fine, peachy, stop talking to me or I'll get a court order (oops, sorry.) But "How are you?" is a whole different question. Asked enough and with enough sincerity, it can open a door where you can really be there for a friend.

So if you haven't started HAY 360 yet, don't fear. There is still time for HAY 330. No, it's not as catchy, but it's still as effective.

The TS Moment(s) of the Month

This month I have two reasons that Teaching Sucks. One of them is a regional reason and one is a repeat reason, but it has been taken to a new level.

First for the regional reason teaching sucks. As I am writing this newsletter, there is a article in the local paper about the blizzard that hit our area 30 years ago this week. It was a winter so bad that the Ohio River froze over. Now I know that may be nothing compared to where some of you live, and it may have no meaning to others, but for us in 1978, it was a big thing. In fact, it was so big that we didn't go to school the entire month of February. (For those wondering, I was in school at that time, not teaching. I'm not that old.) However, the best part of this winter and the school we missed was, and this is why teaching sucks these days, we didn't have to make up any of those days. That's right, it was in the old days of snow days, the days when we didn't have to make them up.

For those that haven't experienced a snow day that you didn't have to make up, it was like a gift from God. I have experienced these days both as a student and as a teacher, and both were some of the best days of my life. The thrill of getting up, seeing a white blanket on the ground, then watch very impatiently for your school to come up on the closed list, was one of the best things in life. It WAS until somebody decided we needed to make these days up. Now it just....well, you get the idea.

On to the repeat reason reason teaching sucks. Simply put, it is testing. I know we have talked a lot about how testing, especially state testing, has made teaching more difficult, but I saw something the other day that took this up a notch. The item that took testing to a new level was an advertisement for a local elementary school that was enrolling new students for next fall. It was just a little portion of the ad that I almost missed, but unfortunately I saw it. It was the date for the Kindergarten Entrance Exam for 5 year olds.

Take a minute to think about this. Entrance exam testing for 5 year olds. Now with the normal trend of trying to outdo the Jones, I'm sure later this year I will see Preschool Entrance Exam dates for 4 year olds. And if you take it to its full conclusion, I'm sure Maternity Ward Entrance Exams for Newborns can't be far behind. Can't we all just get along ...without testing.

Well, whether it is having to make up snow days, or standard based womb testing, those are some of my reasons teaching sucks. Remember to write down your reasons teaching sucks, then wad them up, and throw them away. Now let's get back to worrying about the things we can change, our students.

*Imagin*Education

Last month I introduced the teaching philosophy called *Imagin*Education, or IE, something I have been working on for several years. Some people may be wondering why I am using this space to talk about IE when this newsletter is supposed to be about using humor in education. The reason is because IE is the extension of using humor and laughter in education. One of the reasons I promote using humor is because it helps students relax and allows them a way to be interested in school and content areas. This is one of the basic goals of IE, to be an instructional method that excites and connects with students.

Okay, that may take care of the questions of some of you. Let's take care of another question. Why base an educational philosophy around promoting creativity and imagination in students? From my research on the subject, let me show what other people are saying.

From research funded by the NEA, The Gund Foundation, and others;

- * 88% of Americans believe that the so-called basics in education alone are not adequate for the 21st century workforce without the ability to be imaginative, creative, and innovative.
- * Less than half of Americans believe that American schools are currently teaching skills of the imagination and creative skills well.
- * 70% of employers cite deficiencies in high school graduates among applied skills in the workplace.
- * 78% of parents believe that the ability to think and the ability to reason are more important than academic achievement.
- * Nearly 3/4 of Americans ranked "creativity/innovation" as among the top five skills projected to increase in importance for future graduates.

And read these comments;

"In this increasingly flat world, the most important attributes you can have are adaptability and a creative imagination, the ability to be the first on your block to figure out how all these enabling tools, which are now available to so many more people, can be put together in new and exciting profits"

Thomas Friedman in *The World Is Flat*

"U.S. leadership depends on creativity and innovation and not technology alone in order to compete in the world market."

National Center on Education and the Economy, 2006

The need for incorporating imagination into our education systems is there, but let's face it, we must do it while maintaining an emphasis on skills that state testing demands. That is what *Imagin*Education is designed to do. Some of the components of IE are: Story Based, providing an emotional connection to the content; Problem Solving Based, integrating problem solving throughout the unit; Project Based Learning, which allows students the opportunities to create with the new skills they have learned; Skills Based Learning; promoting the use of traditional teaching methods by using the ESP (Explore, Structure, Practice) structure; Standard Based; Best Practices Research Based; and it has a strong classroom management component. It has the best of what we know about teaching, and translating it to our new world.

Our world is changing, we have to change our students to be ready for it.

These are the Days of Our Lives

For such a little month, February sure has a lot of holidays. Maybe it is to help us get through the winter to spring. Whatever the reason is, remember these are real holidays celebrated by someone, somewhere. So just celebrate!

Month

American Heart Month	Bake for Family Fun Month
Fabulous Florida Strawberry Month	Library Lovers Month
Marfan Syndrome Awareness Month	North African American History Month
National Bird Feeding Month	National Black History Month
National Cherry Pie Month	National Children's Dental Health Month
National Laugh-Friendly Month	National Parent Leadership Month
National Pet Dental Health Month	National Senior Independence Month
National Time Management Month	National Weddings Month
Plant the Seeds of Greatness Month	Relationship Wellness Month
Spiritual Teachers Month	Spunky Old Broads Month
Sweet Potato Month	Youth Leadership Month
Return Shopping Carts to the Supermarket Month	

Weeks

1-7 National Patient Recognition Week	1-7 Solo Diners Eat Out Week
1-7 Women's Heart Week	3-9 Children's Authors & Illustrators Week
3-9 International Coaching Week	3-9 National Consumer Protection Week
3-9 National Leadership Week	3-9 National Pancake Week
3-9 Publicity for Profit Week	4-10 Dump Your Significant Jerk Week
4-8 International Networking Week	4-8 National School Counseling Week
7-14 Rejection Risk Awareness Wee	7-14 Heart Defects Awareness Week
8-14 Love Makes the World Go Round But Laughter Keeps Us From Getting Dizzy Week	
10-16 Freelance Writers Week	10-16 Jell-O Week
10-16 Heart Failure Awareness Week	11-17 International Flirting Week
11-15 Just Say No to Powerpoints Week	11-17 Love a Mench Week
11-17 Random Acts of Kindness Week	15-18 Great Backyard Bird Count Week
17-25 National Engineers Week	25-29 Tropical Shirt Week
24-3/1 Telecommuter Appreciation Week	24-3/1 Nat. Eating Disorders Awareness Week
25-3/2 Read Me Week	29-3/2 Texas Cowboy Poetry Week

This reminder...

February 25 - 29th is Tropical Shirt Week



The best way to feel warm on those cold days.

These are the Days of Our Lives Continued

Days

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| 1 | Give Kids a Smile Day | 1 | Bubble Gum Day |
| 1 | Hula in the Coola Day | 1 | Robinson Crusoe Day |
| 1 | Spunky Old Broads Day | 1 | Wear Red Day |
| 1 | Women's Health Day | 2 | Candelmas |
| 2 | Groundhog Day | 2 | Groundhog Job Shadow Day |
| 2 | Hedgehog Day | 2 | Imbolic |
| 2 | Teach Your Daughter to Volunteer Day | 3 | Four Chaplains Memorial Day |
| 4 | Dump Your Significant Other Day | 4 | Liberace Day |
| 4 | USO Day | 5 | Fastnachts Day |
| 5 | International Pancake Day | 5 | Mardi Gras |
| 5 | Paczki Day | 5 | Weatherperson's Day |
| 5 | Move Hollywood and Broadway to Lebanon, PA Day | | |
| 6 | African American Coaches Day | 6 | National Girls & Women in Sports Day |
| 7 | Chinese New Year's Day | 7 | Wave All Your Fingers at Your Neighbors Day |
| 8 | Laugh and Get Rich Day | 9 | Corvette Day |
| 10 | Man Day | 10 | Plimsoll Day |
| 10 | World Marriage Day | 11 | Sports Wives Day |
| 11 | National Shut-in Visitation Day | 11 | Satisfied Staying Single Day |
| 11 | Westminster Dog Show Day | 11 | White Shirt Day |
| 12 | Darwin Day | 12 | Lincoln's Birthday |
| 12 | Safety Pup Day | 13 | Employee Legal Awareness Day |
| 14 | Ferris Wheel Day | 14 | Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day |
| 14 | League of Women's Voters Day | 14 | National Call In Single Day |
| 14 | Race Relations Day | 14 | Quirky Alone Day |
| 14 | Valentine's Day | 15 | Lupercalia |
| 15 | Susan B Anthony Day | 15 | National Gum Drop Day |
| 17 | My Way Day | 17 | National PTA Founders Day |
| 17 | World Human Spirit Day | 18 | President's Day |
| 18 | Chocolate Mint Day | 20 | Northern Hemisphere Hoodie Hoo Day |
| 21 | International Mother Language Day | 21 | Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day |
| 21 | Single Tasking Day | 22 | George Washington's Birthday |
| 23 | Clam Chowder Day | 23 | Curling is Cool Day |
| 26 | For Pete's Sake Day | 26 | Spay Day USA |
| 27 | Inconvenience Yourself Day | 28 | National Chili Day |
| 28 | Floral Design day | 28 | National Tooth Fairy Day |
| 29 | Leap Year Day | 29 | Intercontinental Tropical Shirt Day |

Don't forget....

February 8th is
Laugh and Get Rich Day
Like you need another reason to laugh.

