

EDUCATION

Learning experience Meaning of 'learning' changing for students today

I grew up in a community where expectations declared students went to a four-year college immediately following high school graduation. That left only enough room for me to decide where I spent the next four years.

There was only one school that I wanted to attend — the University of Vermont. My guidance counselor told me that my chances of getting accepted were slim to none, since my grades and SAT scores were below the stated requirements. She suggested that I apply to one of the easier colleges to get into within the university, and once I was there, transfer to a different one that may not have accepted me.

Dismayed by the lack of confidence this woman provided, who consistently called me Erika instead of my given name, I took her advice and applied to the College of Education at the University of Vermont.

She was correct in the respect that my acceptance to the school

was a long-shot. My grades and GPA were below the school's requirements at the time, but this didn't deter me. Involving myself in extra-curricular activities and being a competitive figure skater were huge components contributing to my acceptance to the only school I wanted to attend. I felt a huge sense of achievement for breaking the barrier of required numbers and scores while receiving an excellent higher education at my first choice of universities. And my acceptance proved my counselor wrong.

There I was at the College of Education, a scared freshman who supposedly would become a teacher. The fact that it was an easier school to get into is not the sole reason for my application there. My prior experiences in high school as a skating instructor and camp counselor reinforced my ability and desire to work with kids, thus my decision to stay put and become a teacher was confirmed.

My main objective within my desire to teach is wanting students to leave my classrooms

By Vicki Isacowitz

ON THE CHALKBOARD



with more than just a grade and set of numbers. I wished for them to carry knowledge away that will exist as more than tested material. I was once a victim of the vicious cycle

where students learn to earn a grade. Once that letter or number is acquired, the knowledge disappears. Numerous times I have heard myself say, "Yeah, I remember learning about that, but I couldn't tell you what it means." I didn't want this to happen to my students.

As a teacher, the grades a student's earn are important, but their ability to demonstrate their knowledge at any given time is more significant. Usually grades and abilities go hand in hand, but it isn't always the case. Some students are strong test takers while others are just as intelligent, if not more, but are less than great when it comes to formal assessments.

We are currently living in a time where educational systems are taking drastic measures to increase student performance and standards by raising the degrees of difficulty on standardized tests. Our students are

expected to learn more and perform better for the sake of increasing their test scores. If students aren't testing well, does making the test more challenging increase their chances of doing better? Does the concept of "teaching to the test" allow students to really learn?

This changes the meaning of "learning" for our students.

Students learn so they gain knowledge, intelligence, and the ability to be successful. Or, are they learning to get higher test scores?

Perhaps the question educators should answer is what happens to the knowledge once the scores are earned?

Students will remember being tested on the subject matter, but will they be able to explain the concepts they once learned?

— Vicki Isacowitz is a Secondary English teacher who has been educating students since 1996. She is co-founder of Clever Minds Educational Services, providing tutoring for students in grades K-12. For more information, or to comment on her column, please call (530) 582-1707 or e-mail: vicki@cleverminds.org.

BRIEFLY

Register for Preschool

Registrations are currently being taken for the Tahoe Lake State Preschool and the Tahoe Vista State Preschool. Both programs offer a developmentally appropriate program for three and four year olds through hands-on experiences that build skills in reading, math, science, art, and physical and social development in a morning preschool program. The programs are operated by Placer County Office of Education Child Development Services with grants from the California Department of Education. There is no fee for the programs, but parents must verify incomes that meet State requirements. Fee-based spaces are also available for families that are over-income. Tahoe Vista State Preschool offers an extended day program that is fee-based with some free full-day spaces for income eligible families. For

more information about either site, please call Susan Fernandes at (530) 546-3450.

Mommy and Me is back

Mommy and Me and Mommy and Me Jr. classes return to the North Shore. Penny Watne will be teaching these popular classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 14. These classes are designed for special "one on one" time for toddlers and their parents or caregiver. Mommy and Me is for 24-48 mos. And Mommy and Me Jr. is for 12-24 mos. Mommy and Me will be held Tuesday and Wednesday mornings from 9-11:30 a.m. Mommy and Me Jr. will be held on the same days from 12 - 2p.m. All classes will be held at St. Nick's Episcopal Church. Contact Penny at (530) 546-2132 to register and for more information.

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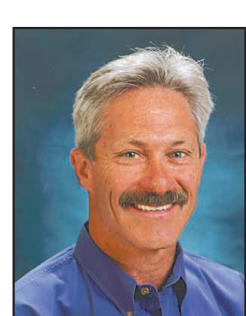
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Please feel free to browse Russ's website:
www.RussBaruh.com.




NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



Discover the Thrill of Tahoe





Congratulations to Sacramento's Amy Tesar — winner of the SVA Summer Science Competition.





Standout projects: This paraboloid, built by 11th grader Amy Tesar and Math teacher Brian Woody (above) utilized sunlight to boil water. Left: The Wooster brothers (center) discuss the physics of flying with Physics teacher Michael Holmquest and guest.



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