



# Teacher Tip of the Week

## New Teacher Support Program 2008-2009

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February 2009

Vol. 4 Issue 20

Teacher Tip of the Week  
New Teacher Support  
Program  
Wilson County Schools  
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### Doubting Thomas vs. Reflective Teacher

*Did I remember to ask the right questions? Was that activity challenging enough? Why am I having so many problems keeping my kids on task? Doubting yourself as a new teacher?*

We all ask questions of ourselves throughout a school day. Reflecting over teaching practices is a healthy habit and one that will help you grow and mature in your role as a teacher. Sometimes, however, our questions tend to lead us into the murky waters of self-doubt. Being a "doubting Thomas" is not a healthy habit. Instead, it undermines our authority and ability to teach. So, how do you recognize the difference between self-doubt and reflective questions? Also, what can you do to get out of that doubting mode?

First, how can you tell whether a question is one of self-doubt or reflection? Begin by identifying the purpose of the question. Does it have one? Is the question one that leads you to eventual improvement? For example, "Was that activity challenging enough," is the kind of question that becomes a reflection about student response, engagement, and mastery of the activity. Once you consider the various factors, you then determine either yes, it was challenging enough, or no, it was not. From that answer you can then move forward to plan equally -- or more -- challenging activities for your students. This type of question serves the purpose of assessing what was done in the classroom, analyzing the data (observations & work product), evaluating the outcome, and designing a way to improve future assignments.

A question of self-doubt tends to focus on you alone as the problem. "Why can't I keep my kids under control," is an excellent example. That question focuses on the teacher's inability to do something correctly. It might be asked over and over without ever moving forward to a resolution. In the end, thoughts might tend toward the idea that there is a deficiency in the teacher rather than a solution to a

problem. A better question might be, "What is causing the students to continually be off task and not follow directions?" That question does not place blame, but instead identifies a problem. Now reflection of past behaviors on the part of the teacher and the student can occur with the purpose of leading to a solution.

Self-doubting questions rarely have a solution because they assume the problem lies with the teacher's abilities or lack thereof. Blame is laid on the shoulders of the teacher and no one else. Little thought is given to analyzing the situation or determining a solution. Instead, the person continues to say things like, "I'm not a very good teacher," "I'm not good at this," "I can't get my kids to behave," or "I'm not sure I can \_\_\_\_\_."

If that sounds familiar to you, keep in mind that doubt removes authority. Students can sense when we doubt ourselves and they begin to doubt us as well. That leads to their questioning our authority...which undermines our ability to teach...which increases our doubts. You see how the cycle perpetuates itself.

If you feel you are in self-doubting mode, what can you do to pull yourself out? First, take a question you've been asking yourself (a problem you're facing) and write it out. Now, look at the question you've written. Does it focus on you or on the problem/ strategies? If your question focuses on you and your abilities, rewrite the question to identify the problem or the strategy that concerns you.

Once you've rewritten the question, take some time to assess the situation. What events and behaviors have occurred that might have led to the current issue?

Write those down as well. I've said this in previous columns and I'll say it again: writing thoughts and ideas down on paper helps clarify what we are thinking

Story continued on page 2...

#### HELPFUL WEBSITE FOR TEACHERS



<http://www.kidsknowit.com/>

Making education fun and free. Free educational Websites For the young, and the young at heart.



#### Cutting Corners

##### I. O. U. BOOK

I've had some success with an "I.O.U." book! If a student does not have his/her homework, I request that they sign their name in my I.O.U. book, which is a 3 ringed binder with spreadsheets in it. I have columns labeled Name, date, assignment, made up? and a 4th column for my initials when (and if!) the assignment is made up. This way, students 'acknowledge' the problem, and there is almost never a complaint "But I GAVE it to you!"



## Doubting vs. Reflective Teacher

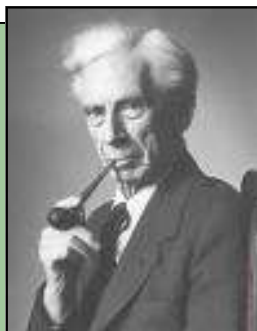
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and feeling. It also helps us stand back from the situation and look at it objectively. Once you've written everything out, go back and analyze it. What could be done differently to get better results? What should be done the same? Evaluate your options and make a decision. What will you do to initiate change for the better in your classroom?

Now you've taken a question that could lead you to doubt yourself and changed it into an observation, reflection, and decision for improvement. Does that mean it will work? Not necessarily. However, the point is that instead of wallowing in your own doubts, you have actively worked to improve the situation. If the outcome is not what you wanted or expected, then start the process again. Now

you have more data to add to your analysis. You have one additional strategy you know does not work. Try something different and continue to work through the issue until you find one that does work.

If you feel you are the only one constantly worried that you are not doing enough -- don't. We all worry. Every teacher worries about lessons, behavior, paperwork, parents...everything that affects his or her students. The question is, do you let worry become self-doubt or do you channel it to more positive purposes? Reflection to assess, analyze, evaluate, and determine a solution turns worries into solutions. Doubting only leads to more worries and more doubt. Don't be a "doubting Thomas." Be a reflective teacher.



**"More important than the curriculum is the question of the methods of teaching and the spirit in which the teaching is given."**—Bertrand Russell

## THANK A TEACHER

"Ms. Betty Doke was a science teacher (now retired but still very active in California education). She was the most encouraging teacher I have known and worked tirelessly to develop her students' individual talents and interests. She applied great creativity to her presentation of the world of science, and each student was made to feel that his or her own special interests were the highest priority to Mrs. Doke. Her encouragement for my own interest in science and engineering was a significant force in my choice of careers, and she has stayed in touch by attending each of my launches on the space shuttle."—Steve Robinson, Astronaut



**STEVE ROBINSON**

Shuttle Discovery  
Mission 1997, 1998,  
2005

International Space  
Station Crew #4



## Organization Station

If you're constantly stopping your lessons to run to your desk or cabinets to get materials, create an organization station at the front of the room next to where you do most of your instruction. Keep sets of math materials and class games in large plastic drawers labeled according to skill/concept so you can take out a drawer to pass out the materials at the beginning of a lesson and return them to the drawer at the end.

Keep a mid-size rolling cart for materials you use frequently during lessons, such as equal participation cards/sticks, sticky notes, timers, wipe-off boards, CDs/cassettes, and so on. A small organizer can be used to hold office supplies you need during your lessons, such as scissors, markers, paper clips, and staplers. A large crate can hold an extra copy of student texts and workbooks to use when explaining assignments to students. With everything together in one convenient place, you'll be able to keep your kids focused on lessons without interruption.—*Angela Powell*



## New Teacher Support Participants:



**Megan Wilson**  
Watertown  
Elementary  
Pre-Kindergarten



**Wayne  
Easterling**  
Mt. Juliet Middle  
School  
7th grade Math,  
Pre-Algebra &  
RICA

### WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

*"I cannot remember a time in my life that I did not want to be a teacher. I wanted to be a teacher the first day I stepped into my kindergarten classroom. I was blessed with wonderful teachers my entire life. They placed a love for learning in me that I want to pass on."*—  
**Megan Wilson**

### WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

*"I enjoy working with kids and I have a lot of experience from federal service as a scientist that I would like to pass on."*—**Wayne Easterling**



## From the Bookshelf:



**Work Hard. Be Nice. :  
How Two Inspired  
Teachers Created the  
Most Promising Schools  
in America**  
by **Jay Matthews**

When Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin signed up for Teach for America right after college and found themselves utter failures in the classroom, they vowed to remake themselves into superior educators. They did that—and more. In their early twenties, by sheer force of talent and determination never to take no for an answer, they created a wildly successful fifth-grade experience that would grow into the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), which today includes sixty-six schools in nineteen states and the District of Columbia.

KIPP schools incorporate what Feinberg and Levin learned from America's best, most charismatic teachers: lessons need to be lively; school days need to be longer (the KIPP day is nine and a half hours); the completion of homework has to be sacrosanct (KIPP teachers are available by telephone day and night). Chants, songs, and slogans such as "Work hard, be nice" energize the program. Illuminating the ups and downs of the KIPP founders and their students, Matthews gives us something quite rare: a hopeful book about education.

## Storytelling in social studies

Storytelling can be used successfully to teach basic social studies concepts and cultural values of people from around the world to middle and high school students.

That is the opinion of social studies teacher Tachmiel Tobesman of Baltimore, who notes that "many facets of stories provide innumerable opportunities for the teacher to expose students to the social studies—anthropology, philosophy, history, folklore and geography. By exploring these facets, the

Teacher enhances and promotes a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

He says stories that stories embrace myths, legends, jokes, riddles, genealogy, hero tales, oral history and folktales.



Studying the stories is not necessary to appreciate the lesson that is couched

within their magical words, Tobesman explains.

It is clear that there is more to a story than just a good tale, but the stories are, first and foremost, good tales. It is not necessary to be aware of their subtlety to enjoy them. In fact, it is better to listen to them just for the fun, excitement and adventure they offer. The deeper meanings actually speak to us more clearly when we forget to look for them. Much more is learned through the passive story than by aggressively reading a text.



# Master Teacher Tips... Communication Skills

We all know that we must listen and understand what is being said in order to interact and converse with others. Yet, in many instances, this is only half the job of effective communication. We must also hear and understand what isn't being said. In addition, we must know that until everything is on the table, on-target actions that result from accurate communication are very difficult. That is why whether we are communicating with students, colleagues, or parents, we need to be willing to do more than discuss what has been voice. We also need to be willing to address any topic that seems to have been skirted. Allowing topics to go unaddressed will negate our efforts to communicate successfully with others.

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If someone tells an off-color joke or makes a remark you find offensive, you can show your disapproval by simply saying, "Some people could interpret what you said as being very offensive." then, do not say any more. You can also frown or shake your head in response to the joke. Either response communicates your intended message without making a bad situation more uncomfortable.



## Upcoming Events

**Library Lovers Month**

**National Black History Month**

**World Special Olympics Winter Games**

**February 6-13**

**Jell-O Week**

**February 8-14**

**Ballet Day February 7**

## For a Laugh!



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