

THE DIVISION 10 TIMES

Editor: Mr. McLeod

September, 2013 Edition

Mr. M.'s September Reflections

I hope everyone has had a fun summer. I really enjoyed being able to spend time with my wife, 10-year-old daughter, and 5-year-old son. As summer comes to a close, a new school year starts. My daughter starts Grade 5 this year, and my son is starting kindergarten.

This will be my 14th year teaching and my 8th year at SKE; my goal is to make my classroom a fun and exciting place for students to thrive, to grow, to work together, and to learn. I've got some great ideas and plans, and I'm looking forward to getting back to work helping students to be the best that they can be and to make the world a better place.



Yours sincerely,

Clay McLeod

Thoughts about Learning

A teacher can think of students as piggy banks and teach as if they are trying to fill the students with facts and bits of information, just like you put coins in a piggy bank. When one teaches in this



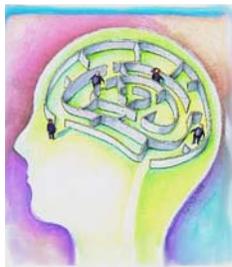
way, one may choose to test students to see whether the students can regurgitate those facts correctly and mark assignments based on whether work lists the right facts.

On the other hand, I think of students as "meaning-makers" who are able to construct their own understanding of subjects and the world. I plan most lessons and activities that take place in the class to give the students opportunities to build understanding and construct their own meaning about the things that we will study. Often, this will involve looking into questions, asked either by me or the students themselves.



Learning Can be Challenging

When a student constructs his or her own understanding of the world, it can be difficult for him or her. In fact, learning can be uncomfortable and even



upsetting. The famous educator Jean Piaget called this “cognitive dissonance.” It means that, as you truly learn new things and as your mind gets used to the new understanding

that you are developing, it can be confusing and challenging. However, this confusion and challenge is necessary in order to really create new knowledge and to develop new skills.

Another educator said that this kind of learning happens in the “*zone of proximal development*,” or ZPD. The ZPD describes the place between where a student can do things well all by themselves and the place where they can’t do things at all. It is a place where they need help (called “scaffolding”) to learn how to do and understand new things. For instance, your child can do “ $2+2=4$ ” without help, but probably can’t yet do linear algebra or rocket science (interestingly, we *will* learn some rocket science this year!).

However, with help, he or she can figure out “ $8,267+986$.” Our job as teachers and parents is to give this support and at the same time to let the student learn skills and develop

understanding for him or herself. This resolves the “cognitive dissonance” and leads to real learning!



Classroom Expectations

In their classroom behaviour, I would like my students to be thoughtful, hard-working, warm-hearted, and cool-headed:

1. **Be respectful and considerate (*thoughtful*).**
2. **Be responsible and cooperative (*hard-working*).**
3. **Be kind to yourself and others (*warm-hearted*).**
4. **Solve problems peacefully (*cool-headed*).**

Over the next while, the students will help to define these expectations in a way that is meaningful to them, and I will teach them skills to help them to meet these expectations. These will involve teaching students conflict resolution skills and creating a safe classroom environment. My goal is to teach the students how to make good behaviour choices for themselves and to encourage them to do so.

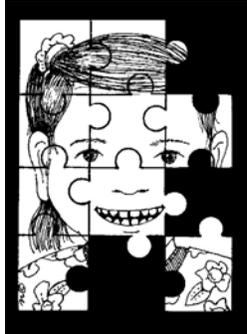
Cooperation in the Classroom

Perhaps the most important skill that a child can learn is how to get along well with others and how to achieve success as a member of a group. For that reason, much of this year’s learning will involve cooperation and team work.

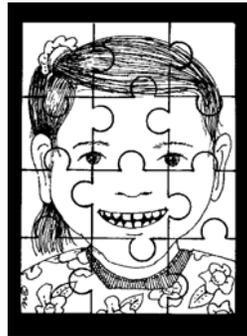
Over the course of this year, your child will have many opportunities to work as a group member, and he or she will be expected to help others, share, listen, express opinions respectfully, and be patient with others. My goal is to teach these skills so that students can succeed together.

Assessment for Learning

The primary purpose of assessing student work is not to judge, rank, and sort students; quality assessment helps them to become better learners. This kind of assessment is an attempt to help students solve the puzzle of how to become better learners. With this in



mind, I would like to emphasize that, although report cards include letter grades, such measurements are not the most important part of the teaching and learning process; student growth and progress, on an individual basis, are much more important.



Having said that, since I will be assigning letter grades, the following will clarify how I assign them. I use criteria (a description of what I expect good work to look like) to mark the students' work. I mark most things out of four. The marks that I give are as follows:

- 4 = Exceeds expectations (excellent)
- 3 = Fully meets expectations (very good)
- 2 = Minimally meets expectations (satisfactory)
- 1 = Not yet meeting expectations (unsatisfactory)

Sometimes, work falls in between one of these descriptions and gets a "middle mark," such as 2.5/4, which would mean that it meets expectations, but neither minimally nor fully.

On report cards, the students will receive letter grades that have the following meanings:



- A = Excellent or outstanding performance (4/4)
- B = Very good performance (3/4)
- C+ = Good performance (2.5/4)
- C = Satisfactory performance (2/4)
- C- = Minimally acceptable performance (1.5/4)
- I = In Progress/Incomplete (1/4 - this letter grade will eventually be converted into another letter grade)
- F = Failing/Failed



Most importantly, whether it comes from the teacher, a classmate, or the student him or herself, feedback, marks, and letter grades should not be seen as a judgment or rank but, rather, as information that can help the student and his or her parents see how the student can work to become a better learner (or a better reader, or a better writer, or a better scientist, or a better mathematician, or a better problem solver, or a better friend... the list is never-ending).

Using Planners and Home-School Communication

I will teach the students how to use planners as a goal-setting and planning tool. I expect them to use their planner daily to record assigned work, goals, and the completion of tasks. I will also encourage students to use their planners to record and plan important dates and events at the school.

I think that it is extremely worthwhile for parents to review their child's planner daily, in cooperation with their child. Going over your child's daily planner entries is a great way to find out about his or her day and to support him or her to organize and plan.

However, because of the number of students in the class, I will not be able to personally check each student's planner every day. I will rely on occasional reviews to keep track of progress.

I welcome written comments and notes from parents, but if you put a message for me in your child's planner, *please* remind your child to bring it to my attention, or I may not see it that day.

E-Mailout List

This year, I would like to send out e-mails to parents from time to time, to bring your attention to important information. To maintain confidentiality, I will put addresses in the "bcc" field so that nobody else receiving the message can see your e-mail address. If you would like to be added to the list of recipients, please either e-mail me, or add your e-mail address to this slip, cut it off this newsletter, and return it to me at school.

Name: _____ E-mail: _____

An Exciting Journey Ahead

A really important aspect of my philosophy of education is that nobody can make another person learn. Teachers and students work together on the path of teaching and learning, and my job, as a teacher, is to create the circumstances where the students in my class can do their best learning. I learn lots in the process, and they teach lots themselves (to me and to their classmates). I look forward to travelling on the path of teaching and learning - wherever it may take us - together with all the students in my class.

Please feel free to e-mail me at clay.mcleod@sd23.bc.ca or call and leave a message for me at the school. The number is 250-861-1122.



Classroom Website

I am in the process of constructing a new classroom website to use as a tool to connect home and school, with links to educational websites. The URL is <http://mistermcleod.weebly.com/>. I will update it as often as I am able to, but I am not able to include information about every single assignment, so parents and students should also refer to planner entries for information about assignments.