

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

... on Motivating Students to Write

By Bill Welker, EdD

D. F. K. Bertolette wrote in his book:

A teacher is not measured by the number of bright students he makes brighter, but rather by the number of indifferent students he makes bright. The indifferent child needs the most encouragement.

Many of our greatest men and women were considered dull or slow during their school days. Of course, it takes time and a lot of patience to teach an indifferent student; yet the result may be ample reward.

It is the duty, therefore, of every teacher to know his students, to find out in what they are interested, to associate the uninteresting with the interesting, and in doing so, should appeal to the higher and nobler qualities which serve to move each student.

(from *MOTIVES OF EDUCATION*, 1916)

Stirred to action by Professor Bertolette's words, I have always attempted to motivate every student of mine, especially those youngsters who were struggling with their studies. The following writing strategy will help parents and teachers to promote composition skills.

The Meaningful Experience Composition Approach (MECA)

MECA is a simple writing strategy that offers children the opportunity to write about topics or past experiences that deeply interests them. Furthermore, the MECA strategy is especially advantageous as a motivational vehicle for reluctant writers. The approach permits them to freely activate background knowledge and experiences on subjects of their own choosing in a non-threatening setting.

The MECA strategy consists of the following five-step design:

Selecting the Topic

- 1. The child chooses a topic or past experience that is of great interest to him or her.**
- 2. The child creates a list of important points or ideas that he or she wants to emphasize in his or her written composition.**
- 3. The child then organizes his or her list of important points in an appropriate sequential order.**

Writing the Initial Draft

- 1. The child develops important points into topic (or main idea) sentences of each paragraph.**
- 2. The child then elaborates on topic sentences by writing detail sentences in support of them, thus completing paragraph structure in the initial draft stage.**

Sharing the Initial Draft

- 1. The child shares the initial draft by reading it to his or her parents, classmates or teachers.**
- 2. The child then solicits comments and suggestions from the listeners regarding content and grammar, taking notes throughout the interaction.**

Creating the Final draft

- 1. The child makes the appropriate content and grammatical changes on the initial draft.**

2. The child then neatly composes a final draft from initial draft changes for submission to the potential audience.

Presenting the Final Draft

1. The final draft could be presented in many formats. As parents, you must be aware of and understand how teachers will have your child present his or her writings. The following are just a few approaches teachers incorporate for student presentation of their compositions:

- Each student reads the final draft to the entire class.
- The students' final drafts are published in the classroom MECA booklet to be distributed to and read by each of their classmates.
- The students' final drafts are published in the school's newspaper.
- The students' final drafts are displayed on school bulletin boards or in various businesses throughout the community.

All children can enjoy writing if they are motivated to do so at home as well as in school. And when your children improve their composition skills, they are also increasing their reading comprehension abilities.

Now that's quite a bargain!

Dr. Welker's Note: After receiving his master's degree from Bucknell University in 1914, Professor D. F. K. Bertollette wrote numerous educational essays and taught high school mathematics classes for the next 40 years. When he passed away in 1955, the educational community lost a great student motivator – and I lost a loving grandfather who inspired me to become a teacher.

Parent Proverb

“He who is only an athlete is too crude, too vulgar, and too much of a savage. He who is a scholar only is too soft. The ideal citizen is the scholar-athlete: a man of thought and a man of action.”

- Plato

Next Month’s Column: “Time Management for School Homework Assignments”

(Editor’s Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Most recently, Dr. Welker was inducted into the West Virginia University College of Education and Human Services’ *Jasper N. Deahl Honors Society* for career achievement and community involvement. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)