

Creating a Culture of Achievement for Ourselves, our Classrooms, Schools and Province

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer - Professional Development

All too often, the mere mention of the word “achievement” in education turns quickly to a comparison of a particular set of standardized test scores. While our improvement efforts focus almost exclusively on academic goals, the reality is that sometimes (perhaps even most times?) the intangibles--the relationships and connections that make up our environments are what can most impact learning.

In the book, *How to Create a Culture of Achievement in Your School and Classroom*, authors Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Ian Pumpian contend that a culture of achievement is far more complex than any one data set can hope to measure or inform – it truly is all about culture.

Creating the Culture

As the authors explore the idea of creating a culture of achievement, they make a comparison to a tree. They remind us that the part of the tree we see above the ground comes as a direct result of all that lies below the surface. If the roots or soil around the tree become damaged in any way, it results in the death of the tree over time. Likewise, if fertile soil or extra care result in growth to the roots of the tree, eventually, that growth will be obvious above the surface.

The authors go on to identify five pillars that are critical

to building a culture of achievement:

1. **Welcome** - Anchored in Maslow’s Hierarchy, this pillar asks us to imagine if everyone considered it their job to make every student, parent, staff, and visitor feel noticed, welcomed, and valued.
2. **Do no harm** - Pillar two reinforces that rules should be tools for teaching students to become the moral and ethical citizens you expect them to be. (I suspect the same should be said of the policies and practices meant for the adults in our system.)
3. **Choice words** - When the language students hear helps them see their own possibility and potential, students perform in ways that are consistent with that language. Words become reality.
4. **It’s never too late to learn** - Everyone learns something new everyday.
5. **Best school in the universe** - Is your school (classroom or province) the best place to learn and teach?

Enacting the Culture of Achievement – Shanghai, Finland, Alberta, and New Brunswick - Where do we begin?

Mention the word “achievement” in international education circles and the conversation will inevitably turn to “PISA” (Programme for International Student

Council Day 2012

Another one down and already planning for next year!

Many thanks and congratulations to the 36 teacher volunteers who serve on our Elementary, Middle Level and High School Council Executives and work so hard to make our May Council Day a success.

Thanks as well to the many teacher leaders who applied to be presenters this year through our first online “Call for Presenters” process. Evaluations to date report another successful year of professional learning opportunities organized by teachers for teachers.

We are pleased to report that 80% of our regular membership and almost 17% of our casual members attended one of our 3 Council Day Programs. Special thanks to those of you who took time to provide feedback through our online evaluation tool! Your feedback will help inform our decisions for next year (May 3, 2013).

Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities!

DSS
July 9-12, 2012

CONTACT
August 7-10, 2012

Interested? Contact
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for more information.

Assessment). Such discussions all too often lead to superficial comparisons of scores between countries, provinces or jurisdictions rather than the more important exploration of what qualities successful education systems possess:

1. They make EDUCATION a priority.
2. They are based on the belief that ALL STUDENTS can achieve and they invest resources appropriately so that all students can do so the first time through (without retention).
3. They have cultures that value education and the TEACHING PROFESSION.

www.pisa.oecd.org/

(Although PISA has yet to identify it as a fourth contributing factor, I have a hypothesis that the highest achieving jurisdictions also have stable governance structures in place that insist on some consistency and coherence over time rather than change for change sake at the urge of an election result or personnel change at the school, district or provincial level.)

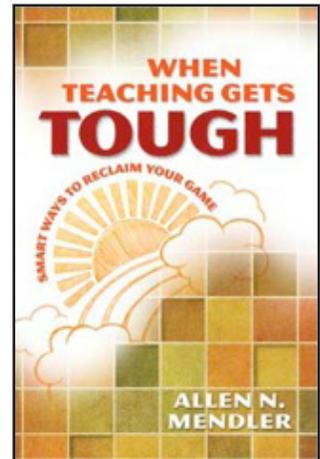
If only creating a culture of achievement were as easy as knowing what needs to happen. Our challenge lies in our ability to “walk the talk” on a daily basis in our classrooms, schools and communities. None of us can do it all, but together all of us can!

Book Give-Away!

The winner for last month's draw is Ann-Marie Dingee of Hampton Middle School. Congratulations!

The book that is up for grabs this month is: *When Teaching Gets Tough: Smart Ways to Reclaim Your Game* by Allen N. Mendler. Send me an email with the Subject Line “Book Give Away” before June 22nd.

Ardith



May I Recommend?

“Attention! Turn Down Your Teacher Voice” by Bryan McCoy in the April Issue of *Middle Ground* is a great classroom management review for all. (p.32-33)

“Watching Us Work” by Carol Ann Tomlinson in the April Issue of *EL* serves as a great reminder to our profession that how we conduct ourselves each and every day is observed and absorbed by our students. A great reminder to hold our profession and ourselves in high esteem.

“Now That I Know What I Know” by Dan Brown in *EL*'s May issue (p. 24-28) is an experienced teacher's reflection on a disastrous first year of teaching. He contends that “it takes a village to raise a competent teacher... New teachers can't do it alone, but with supportive leaders, student-centered policies, solid curriculum, and opportunities to learn their craft and connect with the community, they'll be in a position to earn those student breakthroughs and experience those epiphanies that provide the rocket fuel to continue and improve.”

Closing Quote:

Believe it or not, this is the time of year that I miss being in my old school most!
As I shared my thoughts on achievement above, I was reminded of our school's motto:

“Something Worked For is Something Worth Having”
Chipman Forest Avenue School Motto