

Propelling the 21st Century Student Forward
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ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- ✓ What is it that makes students – even those that have had to overcome enormous adversity - so resilient, and how can the teacher tap into that resiliency so that every student can achieve at the highest level?
- ✓ How can teachers honor the cultural capital of every student so that there is solidarity in the classroom, where students and teachers work together with a common purpose?
- ✓ What are some of the strategies and key techniques that help propel students on to success?
- ✓ How can teachers use students’ practices in other fields as leverage to create new learning opportunities in the classroom?
- ✓ How can teachers create a classroom environment where the exchange of social, cultural, and symbolic capital results in outstanding student achievement?

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Have high expectations for *all* students - Students need to be told from kindergarten straight through high school that they **WILL** be going to college. The language of success should begin early: Advanced Placement courses, National Honor Society, scoring Advanced on the MCAS, etc.
- Students need to be made aware, at a fairly early age, about what exactly they need to get into a good college - good grades, AP courses, co-curricular activities, and demonstration of leadership abilities, etc.
- Speak with students about specific colleges early and often in high school. Help students understand exactly **WHAT** is required to attend that school.
- Bring in past graduates as role models of success to talk to students.
- Incorporate a student's cultural capital in the classroom to offer students opportunities to connect to their learning, thereby affording students agency. If teachers develop an understanding of students' cultural capital, they can build great working relationships and foster positive emotional energy and solidarity in the classroom (Tobin et al 90-91).
- Be aware that students’ “playin,” defined by Kenneth Tobin, Rowhea Elmesky, and Gale Seiler in their book *Improving Urban Science Education*, as "verbal jousts marked by quick wit and sarcasm," builds social networks, and solidarity for today’s youth. Unfortunately, in urban classrooms, where most of the students come from social and cultural histories that differ from their teachers, there can be a dispositional disconnect between teachers and students (90). It's important for teachers to understand “playin” -

without shared understanding and limits, “playin” can break unity and harmony. However, if a teacher taps into it, it can be used to create solidarity and common purpose in the classroom.

- Understand that previous social systems that used to be in place for students (the nuclear family, churches, etc.) may no longer exist for some of your students, so schools and teachers are called upon more and more to provide that support.
- Be aware of stereotypes that keep students down and work quickly to dispel them.
- Make sure your lessons have a real-world connection to a student’s life. Ask them to make these connections frequently through class discussion and writing.
- Vertical teaming is extremely important. Talking with subject teachers across grade level is valuable and necessary. If the 7th grade English teacher knows what the Advanced Placement Literature and Composition test looks like and what is expected of an AP student, for example, s/he can better prepare the student for success.
- Never underestimate the connection between sports and a student's success. Our school raised the qualifying GPA to play sports to 2.5. As a result, our students have risen to meet the requirement. Talking to coaches about a student's progress can also help. Attend student games and activities.
- Never underestimate the connection between co-curricular activities and a student's success. Students need to feel a connection to their school. They need to feel ownership, and clubs allow kids to be part of their school.
- Create a classroom environment where students feel welcomed and respected. Decorate your classroom accordingly, and let students know that you will never accept disrespect from them to you or to each other. Strive to create an atmosphere where students feel compelled to think critically, solve problems, and truly understand material. Use humor in the classroom – not only to facilitate learning, but as an aid, where appropriate, in classroom management.
- Make sure students know that they are NEVER in a hopeless situation. Even seniors who have struggled academically can still be successful. A student may not be able to go to college right away. Some top jobs right now that do not require a college education are: Court Reporter, Plumber, Electrician, Auto Mechanic, Massage Therapist, and Medical Assistant.
- Have realistic expectations for students with respect to homework and projects and make arrangements to help facilitate success. Find out if students have materials to do homework and projects, a place to do work, and the time to do work.
- Students are our business, so know your business. Keep up with the pop culture that affects today’s youth. If most students watch *Gossip Girl*, tune in and see what it’s all about. If students are listening to a particular music artist, listen in, and see if you can use it as a springboard for learning. If every student is reading *Twilight*, take a look at the book and see why it appeals to today’s youth.

BE RESOURCEFUL!

Resources can help level the playing field for disadvantaged students ~

- Donorchoose.org can be a teacher's best friend. Since the last year, I have received over \$10,000 worth of free books, dvds, an overhead projector, and a full-sized air hockey table and ping-pong table for my after-school program.
- ASK, ASK, ASK! Send an email to the production company of an event that you'd like to attend. Explain your school's situation. You can get either free tickets or discounted tickets.
- Try to get positive media attention for your school. When people read about your school in the newspaper, they are likely to contact you to see how they can help. When something good happens in your school, contact the local and major newspapers. You never know - they might want to do a story!
- Encourage students to seek out new learning experiences by providing them with as many enrichment activities as possible. Look for academic opportunities for students outside of the high school classroom - college lectures, book readings, poetry slams.
- Look into summer school programs at colleges and universities for your students. Most economically disadvantaged youth can attend for free!
- Enter your students' work into (legitimate) contests.
- Publish your students' work.
- Apply for grants. There are plenty of them out there, and some are very simple to do. Check educational magazines and journals.
- Show students how to be resourceful - when they see how much you can accomplish, they will not let anyone slam a door in their face.

~SOME IDEAS FOR THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM~

- Help students connect with the literature. This is easily done through journal writing. When students connect literature to a contemporary context, they are better able to understand. Example: A Macbeth journal entry reads:

Journal Entry 4: Summarize an incident that caused you to feel several different emotions in rapid succession. Then write a dialogue that reveals those changing emotions in stages.

- Students write best when they write for an audience – especially if that audience is someone other than the teacher. For this reason, it is great to have students publish their writing in literary magazines, the local newspaper, or the school newspaper. If you have a place to display student work outside of your classroom, do so! Or you can read student work aloud to the class!
- Provide models and exemplars for writing. These examples may be culled from student work (again providing students with an audience for their writing), but they also can, and should be, from criticisms, essays, and other writing from the masters.
- Although process writing is important, students also benefit from writing under time constraints. Writing under time constraints forces students to become cohesive, succinct, and organized writers.
- Provide students with opportunities to write creatively. Because the MCAS requires only one type of writing, students do not have as many occasions to write creatively.
- Increase students’ metacognition about their writing. Have them think about their writing and write about their writing.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in “real-life” writing – for example writing a cover letter, resume, letter of complaint, praise. This can be done through the literature – for example, writing a cover letter for Laura Wingfield of *The Glass Menagerie*.

- Connect writing to the students' personal lives – especially as it pertains to the types of messages they are bombarded with by the media every day. Performing a Feminist Criticism on a film, for example, provides students with the skills necessary to analyze those messages and gives students the tools of analysis that can help them recognize gender stereotypes and the negative or positive portrayals of gender. It will also help students recognize manipulation by the entertainment industry so that they will know when a rhetorical artifact is blatantly sending them a political, spiritual, or moral message. Writing a Neo-Aristotelian Criticism of a speech also helps students become familiar with how authors use language to influence listeners.
- Most importantly, praise and encourage reluctant writers during each step of their writing – sometimes that's all they need to get going. Stick with a student who does not want to write. When students realize you absolutely won't take no for an answer, they'll eventually start writing.
- Look for topics that appeal to students, such as “Is Rap Music Misogynistic?” “Should Undocumented Students be Able to Attend College?” “Is Celebrity Watching Out of Control?” Most students will be eager to research and write about these topics.
- Show students how to research topics through the perspective of another country. For example, in 2006, for the first time ever, the Pope visited a predominantly Muslim country. If you do a search for information about that visit in google or yahoo, you come up with an American perspective of that experience. However if you look at the visit from the Turkish outlook, the news coverage is very different. The list of Internet Country Codes can be found at <http://ftp.ics.uci.edu/pub/websoft/wwwstat/country-codes.txt>. To do a search, go to www.altavista.com. Type in the host, a colon, the country code, and the topic. For example to find out about women's issues in Bosnia type in “host:ba womens issues in bosnia.”
- I encourage you to be a stickler about grammar, punctuation, and spelling. This approach may differ from what you hear from other teachers, but I believe making grammar, punctuation, and spelling an integral part of the writing process from the beginning, will make these concepts second nature for students.

