

the Evaluator

Educational Records Bureau

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Kids Are Sending Us the Best Parents They Have

By Sid Barish

When I was growing up, teachers ruled. My parents revered every word my teachers uttered, and woe was me if I ever complained to my mother about how a teacher spoke to me. Teachers probably have a different story to tell nowadays.

Teachers in schools across the country often lament about the slippery slope they're on when parents come in to talk about their children. Ever eager to be honest, the teacher wants to share insights and examples of the child's work with the parent. While down deep the parents may want the truth, that message does not always come through. In their zeal to get the very best for their child, parents will let hope triumph over reality. The result is often a series of mixed messages: "Handle with care" and "Don't let my child get lost"; but "Push them hard and don't let up."

It is the role of the parent to want what is best for a child. Who can argue with that? At the same time, teachers have important work to do. Their role includes nurturing the child, but it involves developing independence, self-reliance, and fortitude in the children at the same time. This often results in a tension of opposites that can pit parent against teacher. As teachers try to

stretch their students and help them cope with disappointment or ambiguity, parents may view those efforts as ruts in the smooth road they paved. Unless the parent and teacher find a way to balance the tension, the student will play each against the other in a classic game of foxhole.

Picture this, if you will. The student comes home from school and complains that his teacher accused him of plagiarism. The parent races in the next morning and corners the teacher in the office insisting on a conference. No sooner are the two seated when the parent goes on the attack. "How dare you accuse my child of cheating? What proof do you have? I saw him working on that paper for a week, trying his best to get it just right. And look at the reward he gets for all that hard work!" All but the most secure and self-possessed teachers would most likely fire back with a litany of charges and accusations. The facts haven't been discussed, yet the attack is in full force. Just think of the message this sends to the child, who is likely off somewhere in a secure bunker while the parent and teacher are shooting at one another.

How different this scene would be if the parent first spoke with the child about why the teacher might have *(con't on page 2)*



gotten that impression about his assignment. Then if the parent called or arrived to meet with the teacher with the student present to explain the facts, the tone of the conference changes still further. There are no longer adversaries in this scenario. Rather, we see the parent and teacher joined by the student to work out a problem. The student is no longer ensconced in a bunker like an inverted triangle. This time, the parent and teacher are at the base and the child is at the point of the discussion. There will be important lessons for the child in this instance, ones that go beyond the issue that brought them all to the table.

How do schools forge strong and meaningful partnerships with parents? I think it begins by being forthright and consistent. The school's mission should be clear to all and references to it should be made to reinforce what you value. For example, when you say that "respect for all" is important, then adults and children should be required to speak politely and respectfully to each other at all times. When frustrations rise and parents or teachers stray from what each knows to be proper behavior, then an effort should be made to acknowledge the frustration. Simply reflecting someone's ire or upset does not mean cowering to the



behavior. It does indicate, however, that you understand how they feel and are eager to help. You may be amazed at how quickly an irate parent will calm down once you communicate your sensitivity to their feelings. Everyone who is part of the school community needs to understand and honor the mission and philosophy of the school, and you should expect it of all.

It is very hard for parents to be as objective as they'd like when their children's interests are at stake. By nature, they want to protect their children from harm or disappointment. Teachers need to demonstrate that they understand the parental instinct, as they seek ways to work through the apparent conflict between what parents wish and what is real.

Just as parents are sending us the best kids they have, the kids are sending us their best parents. The adults need to work together to build an alliance that supports children during their school journey. The respect they show each other will find its way back to kids. Who knows, we may yet see the day again where the teacher's word reigns supreme.

ERB 2005 Conference Update

Preparations are underway for our next annual conference. We will meet again in New York City at the Westin Hotel from **Monday, October 17 through Wednesday, October 19, 2005**. The Westin is conveniently located in Times Square, just seconds away from shopping, theater, and transportation. To complement this fabulous new location, there is a fantastic conference program awaiting you this fall.

including MTV, Nickelodeon, Paramount Pictures, Hearst Magazines, Time Inc., Pepsi, Disney Imagineering, national college and graduate school admissions organizations, and the U.S. armed forces. The book *Millennials Rising* (co-authored with Neil Howe) has been widely quoted in the media for leading the argument that today's teens and kids are new, very post-Generation-X, and on the whole doing better than most adults think. Come hear about this "good news revolution!"

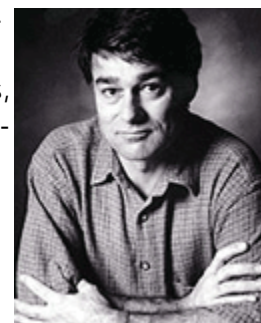


William Strauss

Our Tuesday keynote speaker will be William Strauss, a leading authority on American generations-and a noted playwright, theater director, performer, consultant, and speaker.

Mr. Strauss has advised numerous public and private organizations about generational trends,

Our Wednesday morning keynoter will be acclaimed poet David Whyte. In organizational settings, using poetry and thoughtful commentary, David illustrates how we can foster qualities of courage and engagement; qualities needed if we are to respond to today's call for increased creativity and adaptability (con't on pg 5)



David Whyte

Tips on Building Relationships with Parents*

Here are some helpful hints to share with parents to build the home and school partnership you seek:

1) Whenever possible, both parents should attend conferences with the teacher or the school's open house program. How we spend our time expresses what we value-and our kids notice.

2) Focus on the goal of a parent-teacher conference. It is important to establish an adult alliance to help bolster the child.

3) Share information. Children spend more time out of school than they do in school. Parents need to observe their kids and listen to them. Those car rides in the back seat with their friends can be very revealing. Let the teacher know how your child feels about school, a subject, or outside interests. The information may help the teacher connect better with the child.

4) Grades should be a discussion point not the point of the discussion. Use the information to talk about areas of strength or weakness and how parents can reinforce the teacher's effort while supervising their child's work at home. Offer the parent suggestions on what to look for in the child's homework so they can ease frustration rather than add to it.

5) Inquire about progress beyond the academic arena. Sure, achievement is very important, but so is social development. Make sure parents think about the interpersonal skills their children are developing: how they treat friends or relatives, how they act in social situations, and how they handle multiple tasks or responsibilities. Success will hinge on more than book knowledge.



6) Welcome parents as partners. Teachers need partners in their work with students. Suggest ways that parents can help their children without doing the work for them, or rescuing them from mistakes or misdeeds. It is unrealistic to think that parents will retreat from their children's lives. If they are going to be involved, you may as well offer ideas on how best to help.

7) Let your child develop. Parents need to be reminded to relax and have faith in their children. As hard as it is, they need to let children make decisions and the mistakes that go with them. Not every mistake is catastrophic, and parents need to consider the stakes before intervening at every turn.

8) Leave your own school experiences aside. We all went to school and tend to transfer those experiences onto our children. That's not fair. Parents need to believe that the teacher wants what is best for the child, and should not relive their own likes and dislikes about school when discussing their child.



* Source: "Eight Steps to Parent Success." Michael Thompson, Ph.D. *Time Magazine*, February 21, 2005, p.49.

Making Use of ERB Test Consulting Services

You have put a great deal of time and effort in selecting an assessment program that is right for your school or district. Further time and effort go into ordering and administering the test properly. It takes yet even more time to decipher the multitude of reports you get back from the testing company. If your school is like most, the task of interpreting your CTP 4 or WrAP results falls to a single administrator, or back to the teachers, who already have plenty to do. As a result, score reports may not be getting the full attention they deserve to help guide curriculum and instruction.

If you feel that you could be doing more with your school's results, consider having an ERB test consultant come to your school. Workshops and consultations can be customized to your school's needs. Our highly trained staff can help you improve your approach to curriculum, help prepare board and parent presentations, or train your faculty in the best ways to review test reports. Consultants are located throughout the country, but in the event that there is no one in your immediate area, you can still arrange a presentation in a number of ways.

ERB consultants will travel to any location in their territory. To find the test consultant for your state, please refer to our Web site, www.erbtest.org under "Contacts." For a nominal fee, plus the cost of travel, consultants will give presentations to any group

you like, whether it be a faculty training day, board report, or parent meeting. They can spend an hour or a full day with your staff, depending on your particular needs.

If travel is not possible, our consultants can provide your consultation online! All you need is a computer and a phone, and your test consultant can provide you with the same quality information that he or she would if you were in the same room. This option is most effective for groups of up to 10 people. It may be cost effective for schools and districts where travel expenses make a presentation cost-prohibitive. By using ERB's online presentation services, geography does not have to prevent you from making the most of your CTP 4 or WrAP results.

Don't forget - ERB consultants are on hand at our annual conference to provide *free* individual clinics! A consultant will sit with your staff member during the conference and go over your school's reports. This is a great way for your staff to bring back valuable information from our conference. Not only will they learn about the best practices in education at a world-class conference, they can gain insight into your school's individual program as well! Be on the look-out for the ERB Conference Preview brochure in May, or you can email conference@erbtest.org to arrange an individual clinic.

No matter the method, making the most of ERB test consultants, and test reports, will help you gain optimal benefit from the ERB assessments. Remember, the real work begins after the pencils are down!

Writing Practice Program: Introductory offer still available!

Last month, ERB introduced the online Writing Practice Program to its member schools. With this amazing technology, your students can write essays online based on grade appropriate prompts, and receive instantaneous scores through a secure Web connection. If any areas of weakness arise, they will be directed to online tutorials that will help them revise their essays. There is no limit to the number of essays that a student may write. Because this is a Web-based program, it is accessible 24/7.



The WPP is a great resource for student writing improvement

Aside from the instant scoring feature, teachers and students will both enjoy the online portfolios of their work that can be accessed at any time. The portfolios will allow individual students to see their progress, and will allow teachers to access portfolios for each student in their class.

There is still time to begin utilizing this program at the introductory rate of just \$6.00 per pupil. To get started, simply email erbonline@measinc.com with your request. You will receive a response within 24 hours with the instructions on how to log in to the portal. This rate is good through August 1, 2005, so act quickly to get the greatest benefit from the program for the rest of the season.

Disaggregating Data from ERB's Comprehensive Testing Program

Schools use standardized achievement tests like the CTP 4 in an effort to measure the achievement of individual students and monitor the effectiveness of their curricular program. The reports schools receive for individual students are detailed and useful in diagnosing students' needs. Group scores help identify the success and weakness of instructional programs.



When the testing is completed, however, schools often want to determine more precisely how different categories of students are performing compared to the larger whole. This has become especially important to public schools that need to report scores for different groups of students under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Enter ERB's TestWiz software program, a helpful tool for disaggregating data by category such as gender, ethnic group, special education, or English proficiency, to name a few.

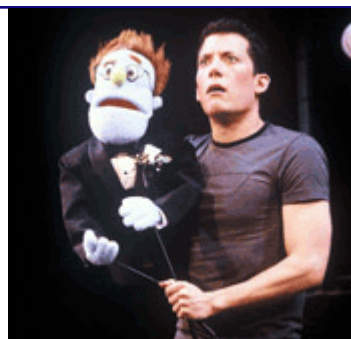
Schools that use TestWiz:ERB are able to:

- *Divide and analyze student performance by multiple variables (gender, ethnicity, special education, limited English proficiency, new admission, etc.)
- *Examine the difference in level of achievement of content area for the groups you identify
- *Monitor "adequate yearly progress" to comply with NCLB
- *Create your own designations and categories for assembling and regrouping data
- *Regroup existing data from one year for distribution to the next year's teachers (spring test results to fall teachers the following year)
- *Monitor the progress of the same cohort of students year-to-year

ERB Conference Update *(cont from page 2)*

in the workplace. He brings a unique and important contribution to our understanding of the nature of individual and organizational change.

And don't miss our exciting Broadway offer - the 2003 Tony Award Winner for Best Show - *Avenue Q!* Tickets will be available to conference attendees at a special group rate.



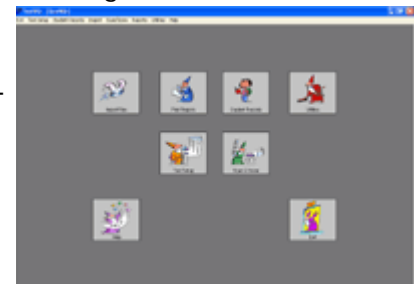
Rod and John Tartaglia from *Avenue Q*

Benefits of TestWiz

Do you want to know the difference in level of math achievement of boys and girls in the middle grades? Would you like to examine the achievement of newly enrolled separate from your continuing students? Have you wished you could quickly obtain results for your gifted and talented or special education students on a particular content area of a standardized test? Would you like to sort ESL student scores by level of English proficiency? TestWiz can help you accomplish all of these tasks (and more) and view results for up to five years at a time!

As you can see, TestWiz:ERB can help public and independent schools, including international schools, use the CTP 4 to fullest advantage.

The availability of disaggregated CTP 4 data is as close as your computer. All you need to do is request your data on CD or diskette (in addition to the paper reports), purchase the TestWiz software, and load the program onto your network or individual workstations. Then you simply sort the data in the categories you want and the information is there for you to review.



TestWiz: ERB has an easy-to-understand interface

There is no better way to set curriculum and instruction goals than with data and research to support your plan. TestWiz: software to help you track student progress and personalize a program for them. And remember, ERB test consultants are available to assist member schools with score report interpretation, including TestWiz applications. Contact us at info@erbttest.org.

Conference preview brochures will be delivered to your schools by mid-May, which will include registration forms and online registration instructions. Be sure to register early to secure your place at the conference, and take advantage of the early-bird rate.

iseeTM

**Time to Sign Up to be
an ISEE Test Site for
2005-06**

A letter will be arriving in the middle of April asking your admissions office to sign up to be a testing site for the 2005-06 season. As an ISEE test site, you may select your testing date, testing time, and testing capacity. If you did not receive the mailing, or if you would like to discuss ISEE testing, please contact Elizabeth Mangas at 1-800-989-3721, ext. 309 or by email at isee@erbstest.org.

***** Important Reminders *****

- * This is the last year for Form 1 of the CTP 4 Constructed Response Questions! Please do not use CR Form 1 after the Spring of 2005, as they will not be scored! (This does not affect the multiple-choice only portion)
- * Due to an unfortunate printing error in our catalog, the Spring 2005 CTP 4 Order Form has the incorrect alignment of levels and grades. Please use the order form from our Web site at www.erbstest.org under "Member Services."
- * Please help us keep our contact information as up-to-date as possible. If there has been a change in your school's personnel, please email it to database@erbstest.org.
- * Catalogs are automatically mailed out to all member schools in August each year. If you have misplaced your catalog and need to order spring testing materials order forms can be found on our Web site, either under "Request A Catalog" or "Member Services."



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