

# the Evaluator

Educational Records Bureau

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## There's No Substitute for a Great Teacher

By Sid Barish

Early in my teaching career there were things I needed to learn about classroom management, motivating students, and developing interesting lessons. I had excellent teacher training so I knew that I had basic knowledge upon which I could build. Little did I know at the time, however, was that the most essential element in my success as a teacher was the concern I showed for my students. The impact of that truth struck me during a visit I had from a former student years ago.

Gregory was smart enough in the ninth-grade Spanish class I taught. He picked up on new words and expressions more quickly than most, and he could speak the language with good pronunciation. Nevertheless, standing out for his good work was less important to Gregory than seeing how much he could "entertain" his classmates. In that department Gregory was a master as he tried to deplete my reservoir of teaching strategies.

For starters, Gregory usually announced his late arrival to class by barging into the classroom after the late bell sounded. He didn't do his homework, called out questions as I went over the assignment with the class, and frequently asked to leave the room at defining moments in a lesson, thereby creating a

break at a critical junction. Gregory's antics no doubt accelerated my own learning as a teacher as I worked diligently to find the ways and means to master my craft and triumph over the challenges he presented. It became so frequent for me to speak with Gregory after class that on many days I didn't have to utter the words but merely looked his way and nodded at his inquiring gaze that inferred the inevitable,

"See me later." And so went many of our days together that year.

As frustrating as it was for us, Gregory and I survived his ninth grade experience. About two years later, after Gregory had gone on to high school, he returned to pay me a visit. Just as in the earlier days, there the two of

us stood talking after the class left the room. But this conversation was different. Gregory did the talking this time. He came for two reasons: to thank me and to apologize. The thanks was for sticking with him and for maintaining that he could do the work and even excel in the class. He expressed appreciation for my calls and notes to his home about missed work or assignments, and for telling his mother about the talent he had and how much he could accomplish if he'd only work at it. The congratulatory letters I also sent when he did exemplary (cont on page 2)



work told Gregory that I was fair.

The apology was for the aggravation he caused me and the time he took from his classmates with his poor behavior. "If I knew then what I know now," Gregory said to me, "I would have been a different student in your class." He went on to tell me how well he was doing in high school and that Spanish was his best subject. (Oh, how I wanted to believe that!) He admitted that the faith I showed in him and my perseverance against his resistance finally registered with him and paved the way for the success he was having in high school.

With those words, Gregory paid me back far more than he took from me. It didn't matter that Gregory couldn't be at 13 what he became at 16. What mattered was that he came to understand what it means to care about someone and to try to add value to their life and learning.

There is a body of research that validates my experience and most likely the experience of many other teachers. Dr. Ronald F. Ferguson, an economist who does research in education at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, identified a number of factors that characterize good teachers.<sup>1</sup> Through surveys and interviews, Dr. Ferguson found these factors fell into the categories of subject knowledge, pedagogy, and the relationship between students and teachers.<sup>2</sup> He views relationships as one of the most important elements of what happens in the classroom. In general, Dr. Ferguson has found that "...effective teachers not only know their subjects but also have high expectations, do whatever it takes to help children understand the material and don't let them give up."<sup>3</sup> Sounds familiar.

In this era of accountability in schools it is sometimes hard to maintain a focus on what is truly important about the work of the teacher, namely, the learner. With greater emphasis on test scores and

school rankings, the relationships between students and teachers are often viewed as "touchy-feely" stuff. The truth is that high standards and regard for students are not mutually exclusive. In fact, if you were to poll parents or students about how school is going, and they declare their contentment, you can be sure they think the teacher is great. "No one remembers a great textbook or a great curriculum,"<sup>4</sup> says author and *New York Times* reporter Anemona Hartocollis. The teacher makes the difference; and the knowledge the teacher brings to his or her subject along with the conscientious approach in performing the job can shape the life of a child forever.



*Relationships are one of the most important elements of what happens in the classroom*

It is gratifying when research supports a logical hypothesis. My experiences have confirmed the lasting impact a teacher can have on the life of a student.

Examples of great teachers and their effect on the lives of their students are all around us. Jaime Escalante, the renowned math teacher at Garfield High School in Los Angeles, was adored by his students long before he was the subject of a book by *Washington Post* columnist Jay Mathews and later portrayed in the film, "Stand and Deliver." Morrie

Schwartz captured the minds and hearts of hundreds of students at Brandeis University before he was immortalized in the bestselling book *Tuesdays With Morrie* by Mitch Albom. Countless teachers across the country are accomplishing the same feats as these heroes by thoughtful and caring teaching.

The importance of the teacher's role in the life of a child confirms the adage, "Kids don't care what you know unless they know that you care." That was certainly true when I was teaching, and it still holds true today. Remember, teachers touch the future.

#### References

<sup>1</sup> Smelser, Neil J., William J. Wilson, and Faith Mitchell, Eds. *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences*, Vol. 1. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.: 2001.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> Hartocollis, Anemona. "One True Thing." *The New York Times Education Life*, November, 7, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

### ERB Allies with AASA

We are proud to announce that we have joined the American Association of School Administrators as an Allied Member of their prestigious organization. AASA is equally committed as ERB to providing the highest quality of support to school administrators. We look forward to working with their members in delivering quality services to aid instruction.

## ERB Obtains Exciting New Online Writing Program

In February 2005 ERB will offer an online writing instrument to complement our very successful paper-and-pencil Writing Assessment Program (WrAP). Students will have an easy to use web-based writing program that will be available 24/7! Once students submit their essay online, they will receive immediate evaluation in 6 areas of writing (overall development, organization, sentence structure, support, mechanics, and word choice) using ERB's state of the art scoring rubric. Moreover, students will have online access to tutorials linked to each rubric category to see where they may need improvement.

As with the WrAP, students will spend about 45 minutes composing their essay. Unlike the WrAP, however, they will then submit it for instant scoring on each of the six writing traits. They will then have access to the online tutorials to help them take responsibility for their own learning. There are five scoring levels beginning in the third grade, and students are exposed to the same five prompt types as the paper-and-pencil WrAP (narrative, informative, expository, persuasive, college prep).



ERB has already run pilot tests of this software, and it received excellent reviews from both teachers and students. Students liked the simple, understandable interface, and everyone involved raved about the instantaneous scores! We are able to offer it nationally and internationally beginning in February 2005 at \$6.00 per student through August 1st, 2005. Don't miss this exciting and low-cost opportunity to help your students gain writing practice to supplement the existing WrAP. Go to [www.erblearn.org](http://www.erblearn.org) to get started!

### Benefits of New Online Automated Scoring Program

- \*Students have **unlimited** practice writing opportunities
- \*Many prompts available at each level
- \*Students are directed to writing tutorials to address noted weaknesses, and have **ongoing** access to their portfolios
- \*Teachers have ongoing access to class portfolios
- \*Students receive **immediate feedback** on the results
- \*Teachers get **instant** information to monitor progress

## Annual Conference a Success - Planning Underway for 2005

ERB's 2004 conference was a great event for both the staff and the attending members. As ever, the conference offered a terrific opportunity for teachers and administrators to network with colleagues from across the country. Even more important than the networking opportunities, however, was the knowledge gained in the conference sessions. Attendees were extremely excited to get back to school to share and implement the ideas and strategies provided by our speakers. As one Director of Admission put it, "I'm still on info overload!"

*"The ERB conference is always one of rich content, great speakers and presenters, and many opportunities to get to know and share ideas with others"*

*-W. Campbell  
The Covenant School*

The true highlight of this year's conference was undoubtedly the keynote speakers. Randy Cohen's opening remarks put everyone in good spirits, and set the tone for the conference. His remarks about ethics and values was perfectly targeted towards the issues addressed in our conference theme. He proved to be a valuable addition to our conference, as did all of our session leaders and speakers.

Planning has already begun for the 2005 conference. Our conference advisory committee has come up with innovative ideas and topics that are sure to be as entertaining as they are informative. We will continue to provide complimentary consultation clinics, as well as the pre- and post-conference workshops led by the knowledgeable ERB staff that attendees have come to depend on to learn more about ERB's products. There will also be a session on ERB's latest product offering, as well as some new entertainment and networking opportunities that we hope you will find enjoyable.

The 2005 conference will once again be held in New York City, from **Monday October 17 - Wednesday October 19, 2005**. It will be held at the luxurious Westin Hotel, located at 43rd street and Eighth Avenue. The Westin is a great location for anyone to stay at while in New York, as it is literally in the center of Manhattan. You will be right in the heart of Times Square, one block from the Port Authority, and central to all of New York's exciting Theater District locations. Be on the lookout for a preview brochure, scheduled to hit desks in Mid-April. We are very excited about the 2005 conference, and hope to see you there!

### Membership Directory Now Online!

In an effort to provide greater convenience to our membership, we have put our 2004-05 Membership Directory right on our website at [www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org), under "Member Services." You will now be able to easily search for a member school alphabetically, or by state. No more wondering where you have left your copy of the directory, or having to wait for another in the mail! The list will be updated quarterly.

### ERB Member Survey

Users of the CTP 4 are aware of the usefulness of our Independent and Suburban School Norms<sup>®</sup> for comparing students between like populations. ERB is considering the development of optional norm groups to schools that may want to compare their students' CTP 4 scores to a self-defined group of schools in a state, region, consortium, or association of schools with common interests or student populations. We have

### \*\*\*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 website at [www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.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@erbtest.org](mailto:database@erbtest.org).

designed a short survey in order to gauge the interest of our members in such an endeavor. Please go to the our website at [www.erbtest.org/pages/ERB\\_CTP4\\_survey.html](http://www.erbtest.org/pages/ERB_CTP4_survey.html) and give us your feedback!



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