Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

Instruction Office Newsletter

April 2017

Volume 4, Issue 8

High-Quality Discussions in History Classes

(Originally titled "How to Facilitate Discussions in History")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Abby Reisman (University of Pennsylvania) says the best all-class history discussions get students wrestling with intriguing questions and reading historical texts carefully and thoughtfully. "Good discussions," says Reisman, "have little to do with magic and everything to do with careful planning and pedagogical savviness. Yes, sometimes students in one class are chattier and more energetic than those in another, just as an otherwise-routine lesson sometime prompts a spontaneous, lively discussion. But more often than not, substantive discussions occur because teachers have a clear sense of how they want students to engage with the text, and with one another, and with the content." Drawing on her work with the Reading Like a Historian curriculum developed at Stanford University, she has several suggestions for sparking such discussions:

- ***Orient students to one another.*** "Students must not only respond to the teacher, but also acknowledge and build on one another's ideas," says Reisman. Teachers should use "uptake" moves, for example, asking for

(Continued on page 2)

IMPORTANT DATES

April 10-	**Passover begins @ sundown**
April 14-	**Good Friday (no school)**
April 16-	**Easter**
April 17-	**Patriots Day**
April 17-21	**April Vacation**
April 22	**Earth Day**
April 29-	**2nd Annual Dolphin Dash (see pages 11 & 12 for more info.)**

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

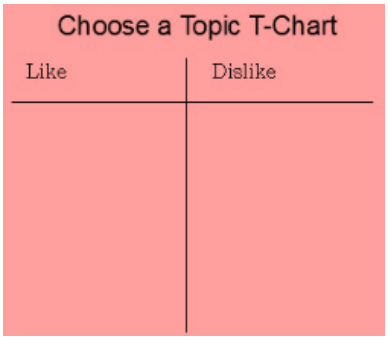
Central office is a **fragrance-free zone** so please be respectful and plan accordingly when you visit.

Due to one of our members at the CO being highly sensitive to any type of fragrance, we ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

(Continued from page 1)

agreement or disagreement and inviting students to build on each other's ideas. Some teachers post suggested sentence starters to structure responses,



record students' opinions on a T-chart, or have students write their opinions on sticky notes and post them on a continuum. "All these techniques," says Reisman, "communicate to students that the work of understanding is collective and that their own understanding will be enriched by listening, challenging, and building on their classmates' ideas."

• **Orient students to the text.** To make sure students understand the gist of a piece of historical writing, the teacher might ask, "What's the main argument in this document?" or ask them to find evidence that backs up an opinion.

• **Design a compelling central historical question.** Reisman has found that the liveliest and most rigorous discussions come when the teacher asks students to judge historical actors or events using evidence from a text. For example, a class was examining abolitionist John Brown's 1859 raid on a federal arsenal through two documents: John Brown's final speech before he was hanged and an excerpt from Frederick Douglass's autobiography recounting how he told Brown the raid was doomed to failure. The teacher considered several possible discussion-starters: *Was John Brown a misguided fanatic? Was he a terrorist or a patriot? Was his raid justified? Is violence ever justified?* But the teacher realized that while these questions were important and engaging, none made students examine the two historical documents. The teacher ended up asking, *Was John Brown's plan a terrible idea? Why?*

• **Ensure accuracy.** When students are getting off track or revealing a misconception or misinterpretation, the teacher needs to refocus them on the text and help them integrate their knowledge and opinions with historical facts.

"How to Facilitate Discussions in History" by Abby Reisman in *Educational Leadership*, February 2017 (Vol. 74, #5, p. 30-34), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2kvWE7R; Reisman can be reached at areisman@gse.upenn.edu.

Having Students Write Before Diving Into All-Class Discussions

(Originally titled "Until I Write It Down")

In this Educational *Leadership* article, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo and Stephen Chiger (Uncommon Schools) describe the following classroom interaction: students read a highly engaging text (the lyrics of "Birmingham Sunday," a Richard Fariña song about the 1963 church bombing), the teacher asks a well-framed question about the phrase "falcon of death," and calls on three eager students who share good insights. Other students chime in, and the teacher has the class spend the remaining ten minutes of the class writing independently about the song's use of figurative language.

"By its design," say Bambrick-Santoyo and Chiger, "this lesson placed the greatest amount of cognitive work not on the students as a whole, but on two or three students who happen to be both excellent readers and bold speakers. The other students didn't have to articulate their own interpretations of the text until they'd already heard someone else do so. In effect, the three students who dominated the conversation put the jigsaw puzzle together. The others got to admire the big picture once it was complete, but they didn't actually place a single piece."

The problem in this scenario is that because discussion preceded writing, most of the class was able to avoid doing the intellectual heavy lifting, and when students did write, most were recording others' insights, not their own. In addition, the teacher's feedback wouldn't come until hours or days later. In scenarios like this, say Bambrick-Santoyo and Chiger, "Writing becomes a tool for evaluation, not instruction. The reality is that people's understanding isn't complete until they can piece their own thoughts together and write them down."

A better approach, they say, is for the teacher to have students read the text, pose a good question, and then ask all students to respond in writing *before* an all-class discussion. "This changes the whole experience," say the authors. "Now every student has a crack at the puzzle, even the ones who wouldn't normally raise their hands." And while students are writing, the teacher can:

- **Circulate strategically. It's smart to start with students who get their thoughts on paper the most quickly, giving others time to get into the task.**
- **Give immediate feedback. Zoom in on a particular facet of the assignment rather than trying to read through everything students are writing.**
- **Plan feedback. Think in advance about the kinds of thinking students might use and how to respond.**
- **Keep it short. Whispering a comment or jotting a note can take as little as 15 seconds, making it possible to see more students.**

While circulating, the teacher can also gather insights on particularly good thinking and what's causing confusion. During the all-class discussion that follows, the teacher can focus on those, perhaps having the class compare two students' responses and debate which was strongest.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Chiger note that many successful writers – Flannery O'Connor, E.M. Forster, Joan Didion, for example – discover what they know and feel *as they write*. "Our students are no different. Until we see what students can articulate in writing, we don't know what they comprehend – and on some level, neither do they. To strengthen our students as readers, the place to start is with their writing… Give your students time to write during class, and give them feedback that responds to their craft and their comprehension. Great writing is a communication

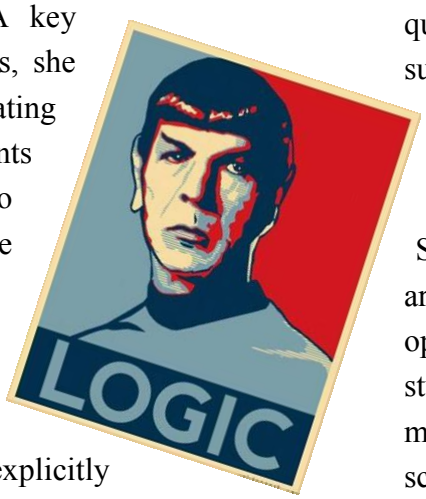
of great thinking, so strengthen reading and writing in tandem, not in isolation."

"Until I Write It Down" by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo and Stephen Chiger in *Educational Leadership*, February 2017 (Vol. 74, #5, p. 46-50), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2kgcsND; the authors can be reached at pbambrick@uncommonschools.org and schiger@uncommonschools.org.

Teaching Argumentation Across the Curriculum

(Originally titled "Why Argue?")

"There has never been a more important time to teach young people to suspend judgment, weigh evidence, consider multiple perspectives, and speak up with wisdom and grace on behalf of themselves and others," says Mary Ehrenworth (Columbia University) in this article in *Educational Leadership*. A key priority across subject areas, she believes, is teaching debating skills – giving students "structured opportunities to engage in deliberative exploration of ideas, evidence, and argument." The key skills of thinking, arguing, and writing aren't innate: students need to be explicitly taught to use logic and reasoning to:



- ***State a specific claim;***
- ***Support it with evidence;***
- ***Correlate evidence to support different ideas;***
- ***Cite authoritative sources to bolster the argument;***
- ***Create questions to deepen their understanding and illuminate complexity;***
- ***Revise their ideas and evidence to make a logical and compelling sequence;***
- ***Lead their audience through their argument with a clear introduction and sophisticated transitional phrases;***
- ***Consider opponents' strongest points so they can acknowledge or refute counterarguments;***
- ***Acknowledge nuance and conditionality.***

Drawing on her work with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, Ehrenworth shares some insights about developing students' argumentation skills:

• ***Start with talk.*** One of the best ways to develop students' ability to argue in writing is to improve the level of spoken argument by having small groups of students engage in quick, one-on-one "flash debates" (see below for suggested topics). As students conduct these mini-arguments, the teacher circulates, commenting on effective and less-effective approaches.

• **Develop a strategic curriculum.** Students need lots of practice to get better at arguing, so schools should make sure students have opportunities to hone their skills in English, social studies, science, math, and other subjects as they move through the grades. For example, a middle school could have students in ELA debate the pros and cons of interscholastic sports, in social studies whether the American Revolution radically changed conditions for many people, and in science which forms of renewable energy citizens should adopt.

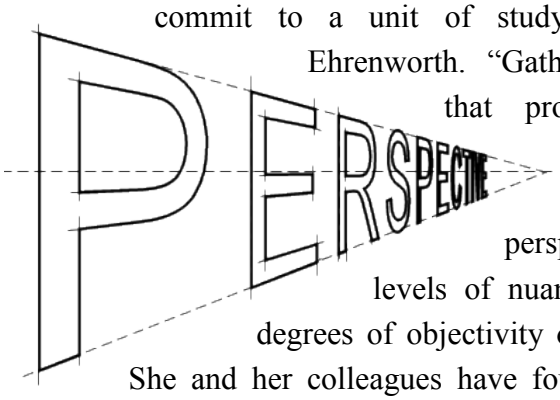
• **Choose and prepare content.** It's important to get students debating meaty topics

that are open to legitimate dispute – not, for example, whether the Holocaust happened. Here are some possibilities:

- Is this story more about x or y?
- Which character has the greatest impact on events?
- Are zoos good or bad for endangered animals?
- Are rats friend or foe to humans?
- Overall, are cell phones in schools helpful or damaging?
- Was westward expansion a force for good?
- Athens or Sparta: which is a better model for today's youth?

- Was the U.S. Civil War won more through strategy, supplies, or ideas?
- Which NASA proposal should be funded: space stations, asteroid mining, or terraforming?
- Bottled water or tap water: which should the United Nations fund abroad?
- What is the best way to limit climate change: control carbon emissions, limit greenhouse gasses, or …?
- Should we protect wolves in national parks?

Then it's important to seek out or develop sets of relevant texts. "You'll save yourself frustration later if you make sure there are good texts for your students' age and reading levels before you commit to a unit of study," says Ehrenworth. "Gather texts that provide a variety of perspectives, levels of nuance, and degrees of objectivity or bias." She and her colleagues have found that having students surf the Internet is not a good use of valuable classroom time. Better for students to be reading, critiquing, thinking, and writing with a well-chosen set of texts with which the teacher is familiar. With well-chosen material, even students in the primary grades can engage in making claims, making logical arguments, and citing sources.



• Teach students how to apply their skills in new situations. This might involve charts with major reading and writing strategies in an argument unit, student-made props with effective strategies, teaching tools on specific small-group and conference skills, mentor texts incorporating strategies, exemplar arguments, and writing checklists. It's also a good idea for teachers to share their tools to coordinate between grades and avoid duplication.

"Why Argue?" by Mary Ehrenworth in *Educational Leadership*, February 2017 (Vol. 74, #5, p. 35-40), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2jQ7o3X; Ehrenworth can be reached at mary@readingandwritingproject.com.

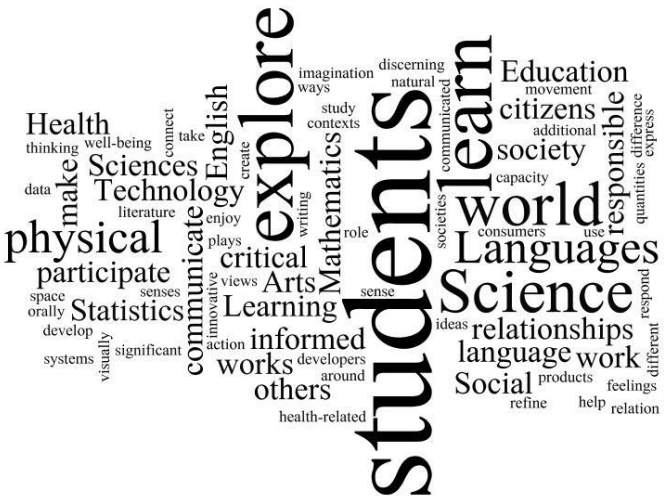
Scaffolding Reading by Activating and Filling in Prior Knowledge

(Originally titled "Text Prep")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Doug Buehl (Edgewood College) says that background knowledge is a make-or-break variable in students' reading comprehension. He quotes literacy expert David Pearson: "Knowledge begets comprehension begets knowledge." The problem is that in any given classroom, there's wide variation in students' prior knowledge. That's why

frontloading is an important teacher strategy with complex texts. "Frontloading provides much-needed scaffolding for students who come to our classrooms lacking access to academic knowledge in their out-of-school lives," says Buehl. "Frontloading should not be a foretelling of what the text says before students read; that's the reader's job to figure out." Instead, it builds a bridge between students' existing knowledge and what's required to make meaning of the text. Buehl suggests three approaches:

• ***Author references*** – Nonfiction writers often include quick references connecting new material with prior knowledge, assuming the reader will understand them. When students don't, it's tempting for them to "glide over such references without thoughtful pauses to integrate the new with the known," says Buehl. Teachers need to draw attention to these references, but if they do so in an all-class discussion in which only a few knowledgeable students participate, the majority of students won't make the connections. Far better to get have students turn and talk with a classmate to discuss what they understand before diving into a difficult text. The teacher might have students do a quick-write (*A science word I connect to volcanoes is ___ because ___*, or *A common mistake when balancing equations is ___, so it's important to ___*) and then discuss them with partners or post them on sticky notes. Or students might construct knowledge maps, generating terms associated with a central concept in the text – for example, in a unit on the French Revolution, the word *aristocracy* could be linked to *elites, ancient Greeks, inherited wealth*.



• ***Pooling students' knowledge*** – The teacher can get small groups of students sharing what they know by posing a thought-provoking statement or question – for example, in a culinary arts class, asking students to create a T-chart on whether organic foods are healthier than non-organic foods. A variation on that activity is presenting 4-6 arguable statements on the topic (for example, *If you eat too much, your stomach could burst*) and asking students to gather evidence pro and con and debating the merits.

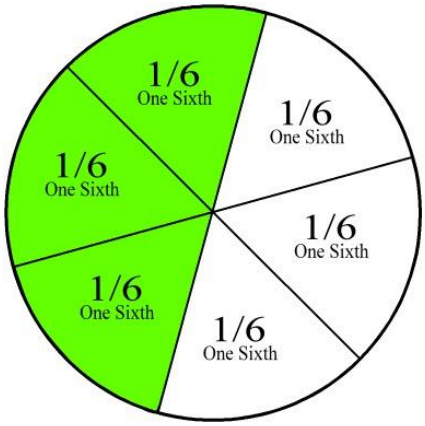
• ***Predicting through vocabulary knowledge*** – Before students read a text, the teacher presents several challenging words they'll encounter and asks teams of students to examine and speculate about them. "Rather than merely telling students definitions of difficult vocabulary," says Buehl, "this process engages students in exploring the possible relationships among the words, sharing current knowledge about known terms, and predicting possible meanings." Students can also be asked to divide the words into new, domain-specific, and

known words, or pair words that are closely associated with one another. The teacher might also give students a list of challenging words in the order in which they appear in the text and have students write a predictive paragraph using all the words in sequence.

"Text Prep" by Doug Buehl in *Educational Leadership*, February 2017 (Vol. 74, #5, p. 60-66), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2lcxMRL; Buehl is at drbuehl@sbcglobal.net

Elementary Fractions Instruction That Leads to Success in Algebra

In this article in *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Jessica Rodrigues, Nancy Dyson, and Nancy Jordan (University of Delaware) and Nicole Hansen (Fairleigh Dickinson University) say that fraction knowledge is a stronger predictor of students' eventual mastery of algebra than family income, family level of education, and overall IQ. "Thus," they say, "bolstering students' fraction understanding is a critical step in preparing students for algebraic thinking" – and this is especially true of students with special needs.



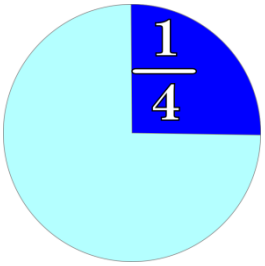
Why the strong link between understanding fractions in the elementary grades and mastering algebra in middle or high school? "Beyond the frequent presence of fractions in algebraic equations (e.g., ½x = 24)," say the authors, "fraction knowledge and algebraic thinking share important conceptual underpinnings." The Common Core standards (3OA.B.5) include understanding properties of multiplication and the relationship between multiplication and division, which is important to seeing 4/2 as four groups of ½, two sets of 2/2, or 4 ÷ 2. This kind of fraction knowledge enables students to solve more-advanced problems like 6 = 12*y* (thinking 12 times ? = 6 or 6/12 = *y*).

Why do so many elementary students find fractions baffling and frustrating? Rodrigues, Dyson, Jordan, and Hansen say there are three related barriers:

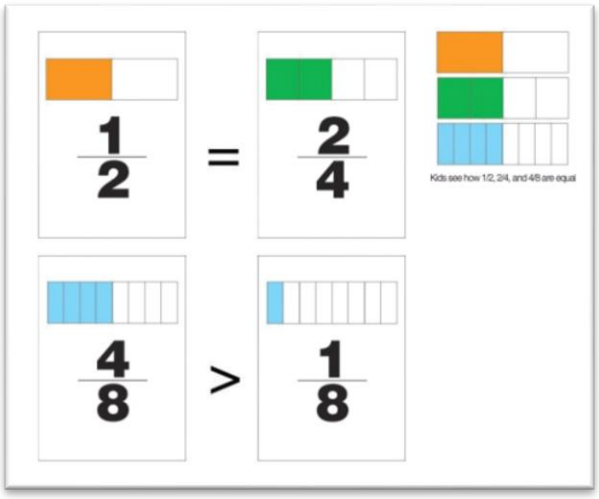
- **Students focusing on the numerator as a counting number and ignoring the denominator;**
- **Not grasping how the numerator and denominator work together to determine the magnitude of the fraction;**
- **Not understand that fractions are magnitudes that can be represented on a number line.**

Students with these misunderstandings, asked to shade in one third of a rectangle divided into six parts, will shade in only one segment. Similarly, if asked to place the fraction ½ on a number line from 0 to 2, they will put it halfway along the line.

The key to overcoming these confusions is introducing number line activities that focus on the relationship of the numerator and denominator and how this relationship determines the magnitude of the fraction. This approach should start as early as third grade, say the authors. To make such activities vivid and understandable to elementary students, they suggest introducing real-world contexts – for example, imagining a race with water stations



set up every quarter mile along the course. Thus the fractions would be 1/4, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/4, 7/4, 8/4, 9/4, and so on. Students learn how to mark whole and half miles, move to quarter miles, and then convert fractions larger than one to mixed numbers. (See the full article for visuals and more detail.)



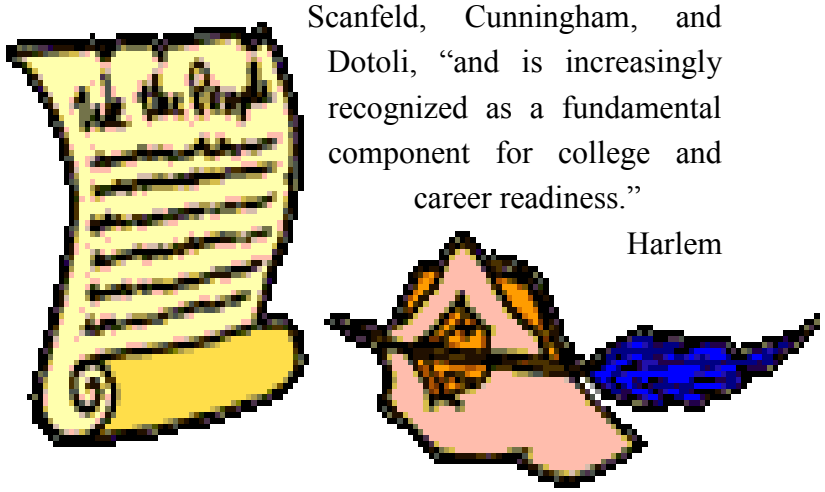
The authors also suggest getting students chorally counting along a fractions number line; using the race course number line to add and subtract fractions by counting forward or backward; and using the number line to do quick mental math game activities such as finding which positions are greater than and less than a whole or than each other. Here are the authors' suggestions on how a lesson might be divided up:

- **3 minutes of oral counting of fraction magnitudes;**
- **20 minutes of number-line race course activities;**
- **3 minutes of whole number multiplication fluency practice using flash cards;**
- **10 minutes of independent practice;**
- **5 minutes of fractions games using flash cards;**
- **4 minutes of a quick formative assessment on the concepts taught so far.**

"Preparing for Algebra by Building Fraction Sense" by Jessica Rodrigues, Nancy Dyson, Nicole Hansen, and Nancy Jordan in *Teaching Exceptional Children*, November/December 2016 (Vol. 49, #2, p. 134-141), http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0040059916674326; Jordan can be reached at njordan@udel.edu.

Using Primary Sources to Teach U.S. History

In this article in *AMLE Magazine*, Sean Robertson, Vanessa Scanfeld, and Vincent Dotoli (Harlem Academy, New York) and Chris Cunningham (King School, Connecticut) describe how they have thrown out history textbooks and used primary sources in their place. What's wrong with textbooks? The biggest problem is superficial coverage that doesn't engage students in meaningful questioning or the kind of thinking that makes learning stick. "Primary source analysis is a central tool in developing students' confidence when faced with challenging texts," say Robertson, Scanfeld, Cunningham, and Dotoli, "and is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component for college and career readiness."



Harlem Academy has been using this approach since 2010, having students decode primary texts by reading them aloud in class,

highlighters in hand, and when a student says, "Ding!" stopping to define an unfamiliar word. Here's their procedure:

- ✓ **Read the document carefully, defining unfamiliar vocabulary.**
- ✓ **Re-read the document and identify the main idea.**
- ✓ **Write an attribution sentence that includes the author, title, year, and main idea.**
- ✓ **Select 5-10 key words or phrases that best support the main idea.**
- ✓ **Follow the attribution sentence with a full paragraph summary integrating all the key words and phrases and then write a concluding sentence.**

Students also develop empathy by putting themselves in the shoes of historical players. "As students learn that history is driven by basic human motivations, desires, and fears," say Robertson and colleagues, "they come to understand the role of individuals in defining our nation's path and their potential to effect change."

Here are some of the online sources Harlem Academy has used to gather primary source material:

- ✓ **The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, a searchable database of vetted lesson and unit plans and more than 60,000 primary sources:** https://www.gilderlehrman.org
- ✓ **The Avalon Project (Yale Law School) has hundreds of primary sources on U.S. history:** http://avalon.law.yale.edu
- ✓ **Georgetown's September 11th Sourcebooks has hundreds of documents on 9/11 and other national security issues:** http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/sept11/
- ✓ **The Stanford History Education Group's Reading Like a Historian curriculum has 71 document-based lesson plans in 11 units:** https://sheg.stanford.edu/rlh
- ✓ **The World Digital Library has a database of more than 7,000 primary sources searchable by date, location, and theme:** https://www.wdl.org/en/

"Throw Out Your History Textbook: A Case for Primary Source Analysis" by Sean Robertson, Vanessa Scanfeld, Chris Cunningham, and Vincent Dotoli in *AMLE Magazine*, February 2017 (Vol. 5, #1, p. 25-27), http://bit.ly/2kCJoO7; Robertson is at srobertson@harlemacademy.org.

Who's Doing the Work Here?

"Many middle-level teachers spend hours providing feedback to students that is only sometimes put to good use," says Australian school leader Rachael Williams in this article in *AMLE Magazine*. "Feedback is meaningless if it does nothing to improve student learning. Teachers know this, but are often exhausted by the endless cycle of teacher-driven assessment and feedback. It can be difficult to step back and change what is a widely accepted system of summative grading and commenting."

The key, says Williams, is getting away from the notion of the teacher as "the omniscient critic whose job it is to point out mistakes" and getting students to take a more active role in the feedback process. Here are her suggestions:

❖ **Establish different expectations.** Students usually start the year or semester with the expectation, explicitly or implicitly, that the teacher will give them grades and comments when their work is done. What about starting with a very different expectation – that students will learn more if they are actively involved in the feedback process?

❖ **Clarify learning outcomes.** This means student-friendly learning targets and every student understanding what's involved in successfully meeting those goals, including perusing exemplars of student work from previous years. Williams suggests having students do an initial self-assessment of what they know and don't know about the learning target (perhaps with red, yellow, and green "traffic light" stickers).

❖ **Give students the tools to provide effective feedback.** Students should have frequent opportunities to self-assess throughout the learning process, getting ongoing feedback on how they are progressing toward the learning goal. Peer feedback can be effective if students are tutored in going beyond vague praise or unhelpful detail. John Hattie suggests giving students prompts like these: *What worked well was…, Even better if…, I noticed… , I wondered…*

It's especially helpful if students focus feedback to classmates on a specific question – for example, if the learning target is presenting a balanced argument, looking for the effective presentation of both sides of the argument.

❖ **Give less feedback.** Williams says that when teachers do too much of the feedback work, it signals that the teacher, not the student, is responsible for learning – and perhaps that the adult doesn't believe the student is capable of doing the work. "A more balanced approach," she says, "is to ask students to self-assess before meeting with the teacher… Students bring evidence of their learning and self-assessment to the discussion, allowing them to view themselves as valued and effective agents in their learning." It also gives the teacher an opportunity to offer students feedback on their feedback: *Does this help you understand what you've mastered? Do you know what to do next?*

"Feedback for Students, by Students" by Rachael Williams in *AMLE Magazine*, February 2017 (Vol. 5, #1, p. 8-10), http://bit.ly/2l7rJl3; Williams is at rachael.williams@bgs.vic.edu.au.

2nd Annual

DOLPHIN DASH

5K ROAD RACE/WALK

10 a.m. Saturday April 29, 2017

KIDS' FUN RUN AT 9:30 A.M.

Pre-race Dinner Friday Evening April 28th

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School

We are proud to announce the ***DOLPHIN DASH ROAD RACE***, to be run on Saturday April 29th at 10 a.m. starting at Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School 210 Station Avenue, South Yarmouth. This is a 5k Run/Walk with a Kids' Fun Run at 9:30.

All money raised will be used to reduce
D-Y High School Student Athlete User Fees!

PRE-RACE DINNER SPONSORED BY

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SINCE 1986
RESTAURANT TAVERN

Served in the D-Y Cafeteria Friday Evening April 28th from 5 to 7 p.m.
Avoid the registration line on Saturday morning!
Enjoy a nice pasta meal, pre-register, collect your running bib, and T-shirt Friday night.
All runners are welcome.
$35 registration fee includes Friday Night Pasta Dinner & long sleeve T-shirt Student registration fee $25

Register online at *www.RaceWire.com*

Kids' Fun Run is free for ages 11 and under
(No registration required – sign up at the race site on race day)
Questions - please contact:
Dr. Paul Funk, Assistant Principal/Athletic Director
(508) 398-7645 or funkp@dy-regional.k12.ma.us

Thank you!

2nd Annual -- Donor Information

DOLPHIN DASH

5K ROAD RACE

RUN, WALK & KIDS' FUN RUN

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$35 early registration fee includes Friday night Pasta Dinner and Long Sleeve T-Shirt D-Y Student discount - Register for just $25

Donor Information

*We are asking for **your support** in helping to eliminate user fees for all student athletes here at Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School. For $250 tax deductible donation, your company name and logo will appear on our race shirts. A larger donation will get you a larger logo on the shirt.*

$250	2" x 2" logo + 1 Complimentary T-Shirt & 1 Runner Registration
$500	2.5" x 3.5" logo + 2 Complimentary T-Shirts & 2 Runner Registrations
$1000	3" x 7.5" logo + 4 Complimentary T-Shirts & 4 Runner Registrations

Please send donations to:
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School
Athletics Department
210 Station Avenue, South Yarmouth, MA 02664

Please make all checks payable to:
Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School Athletics

Questions: please contact Dr. Paul Funk, Assistant Principal/Athletic Director
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Thank you!