



## Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

### Instructional Office Newsletter

## Orchestrating “Flow” in the Classroom

In this online article, John Spencer (George Fox University) suggests five ways teachers can increase the chances of students experiencing “flow” – a zone of intense concentration and immersion that may be experienced by athletes, artists, authors, musicians, engineers – and yes, students – when time and distractions are almost completely tuned out and performance is at a higher level. “It’s a strange paradox,” says Spencer, “where time seems to stand still and yet it seems over in an instant. It feels effortless even though it’s an extreme challenge. There’s a sense of relaxation but it’s also intense. You seem more present than ever but you can lose your sense of self.” The idea of flow has been around for thousands of years, but Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi popularized the term in the 1970s and 80s when he observed artists so absorbed in their creative work that they lost track of time and even ignored the need for food, water, and sleep. How do we increase the incidence of flow in classrooms? Spencer suggests five preconditions that make it possible:

- ✓ *The task needs to be intrinsically rewarding to students. It has to engage their internal drive and fit their passions, interests, talents, or desires. It can be solitary or group-oriented, competitive or non-competitive, artistic or athletic.*
- ✓ *There needs to be clear goals and a sense of progress. And students need a sense of agency: “You need to feel that you have a command over what you are doing,” says Spencer. “In the moment, it can feel effortless. However, it’s often an exceptionally challenging situation. You’re often doubtful of success ahead of time. But this uncertainty is part of what makes the challenge fun.”*

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## April 2018

## Volume, 5 Issue # 8

### IMPORTANT DATES

April 1	April Fool’s Day Easter Sunday
April 2	World Autism Day
April 7	Passover Ends District Mentor Training (Slots available)
April 16	Patriots Day
April 16-20	Spring Vacation
April 22	Earth Day
April 25	Administrative Professional Day



### IMPORTANT NOTICE:

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

**D**ue 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!





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- ✓ *There needs to be clear and immediate feedback. “In other words,” says Spencer, “it should be easy to figure out what’s working and what’s failing... [and] modify and adjust what you are doing based on this instant feedback.”*
- ✓ *The challenge must match one’s perceived skills. If a task is not challenging, boredom and apathy can set in. If it’s beyond one’s skill level, anxiety and frustration might result. Flow is in the sweet spot of high challenge matching a high level of skill in that area.*
- ✓ *Flow requires intense focus on the present moment. Csikszentmihalyi said people in a state of flow “often stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing.” But at the same time, these are the moments when they feel most alive.*

So how can teachers maximize flow in their classrooms? Spencer has experimented with ideas when he was a middle-school teacher and now as a university professor and has these preliminary suggestions:

- *Provide the right scaffolding for the task.* For a writing project, this might be sentence stems, tutorials, or graphic organizers.
- *Tap into intrinsic motivation.* This means being creative with the required curriculum by asking big questions, posing interesting challenges, creating simulations – and sometimes just being goofy.
- *Embrace student choice and agency.* Maximize student-centered, creative projects. Ask, “What am I doing for students that they could be doing for themselves?”
- *Minimize distractions.* Creativity can be noisy, says Spencer. “However, this can also be distracting. It’s not a bad thing to reduce clutter or decrease noise and allow students to reach that state of hyper-focus. It can also help to slow down.”
- *Help students with metacognition.* Teach them to visualize where they’re going, assess the task, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, plan an approach, apply strategies, monitor progress, reflect on what’s working, and continuously make adjustments.

**“Five Ways to Boost Student Engagement with Flow Theory” by John Spencer, December 3, 2017, <http://www.spencerauthor.com/flow-theory/>;**

Spencer is at [jspencer@georgefox.edu](mailto:jspencer@georgefox.edu).

## Jay McTighe on What Matters When We Assess Learning

(Originally titled “3 Key Questions on Measuring Learning”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, curriculum design guru Jay McTighe says that educators, parents, and policymakers need to address three questions about classroom learning: What matters, how we measure it, and how to make assessment part of the learning process.

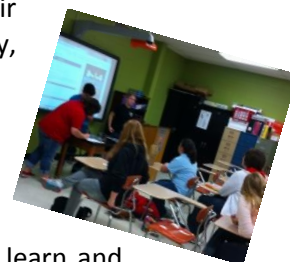
- **What really matters in our schools?** Schools strive to impart knowledge, skills, conceptual understanding, and long-term transfer:

- **Knowledge** – For example, vocabulary, factual information, and basic concepts;
- **Skills** – For example, multiplication, handwriting, drawing, shooting free-throws;
- **Enduring understandings** – “Big ideas” that are conceptual and abstract;
- **Long-term transfer** – Students’ ability to apply their learning in new situations, over time – for example, communicate well in writing, work in a team, solve problems, take the initiative. These are the areas most valued by employers.

Knowledge and skills can be assessed quite accurately with multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blanks tests. But conceptual understanding and transfer can be assessed only with authentic, performance-based assessments that ask students to apply their learning in new situations, explain their thinking, show their reasoning, and justify their conclusions. “Authentic assessments are like the game in athletics,” says McTighe. “While the players have to possess knowledge (the rules) and specific skills (dribbling), playing the game also involves conceptual understandings (game strategies) and transfer (using skills and strategies to advantage in particular game situations).” It’s also important to involve students in choosing how to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, creativity, persistence, and community contributions.

- **What are the best ways to assess student learning?**

Assessments should be geared to what students were supposed to learn and





give an accurate picture of what was actually learned. Because no assessment is perfect, multiple measures are best: a “photo album” is preferable to a single snapshot. The biggest problem with standardized tests is that they tend to measure what’s easiest and cheapest to assess, shortchanging outcomes like speaking, listening, argumentation, creative thinking, scientific investigation, research, historical inquiry, and transfer.



Classroom assessments should do a better job than standardized tests at measuring these important outcomes, but that’s seldom the case. One study that gathered all of a school’s classroom assessments over a six-week period found that most mirrored the shortcomings of standardized tests – they measured lower-level skills with mostly multiple-choice, true-false, matching, or fill-in-the-blanks items. McTighe suggests that schools do a similar “stack audit” of classrooms assessments to see if they are assessing higher-order learning – and if not, make a concerted effort to move in that direction.

• **How can assessments enhance, not just measure, learning?** The best way to accomplish this is through performance tasks that simulate real-world situations. “Like the game in sports or the play in theater, authentic performances are motivating to learners,” says McTighe. “They give relevance and purpose to learning, and they underscore the need for practice. Authentic tasks also influence teaching. Coaches recognize that their job is not to simply ‘cover’ the playbook play-by-play and teach individual skills. They understand that knowledge and skills are in service of larger ends, and that their role is to prepare players for authentic transfer performance in the game.” Here are some characteristics of assessment practices that enhance learning:

- **The ultimate learning goal and its assessment criteria are known up front.**
- **Models of excellent performance are available.**
- **Assessment tasks demand application in a realistic context.**
- **Assessments are challenging yet attainable.**
- **There isn’t a single right way of doing well.**
- **Collaboration is built in.**
- **Students show tangible products as they progress.**



- **Detailed feedback is provided during the learning process.**
- **Students can practice, refine, and re-do based on feedback.**
- **The teacher is not the only audience.**
- **Students have some choice in how they will demonstrate learning.**
- **The teacher functions like a coach.**
- **Students self-assess, reflect on their learning, and set future goals based on the results.**

Schools that have adopted assessment practices like these have needed to make shifts in grading practices and scheduling, including carving out blocks of time for teacher teams to craft assessments and analyze student results.

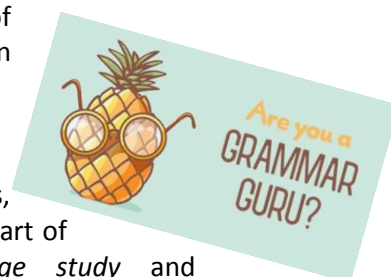
**“3 Key Questions on Measuring Learning”** by Jay McTighe in *Educational Leadership*, February 2018 (Vol. 75, #5, p. 14-20), <http://bit.ly/2ElBcfw>; McTighe can be reached at [jay@mctighe-associates.com](mailto:jay@mctighe-associates.com).

## Escaping “Red-Pen Mode” Teaching Grammar

“There is no word so haunted in English language arts as ‘grammar,’” say Michelle Devereaux and Darren Crovitz (Kennesaw State University) in this article in *English Journal*. “Utter it in a classroom and call forth a legion of negative associations. *Endless arcane rules never mastered. The tedious trivia of worksheets and drills. Essays marked in frustrated teacher shorthand.* Watch students resign themselves to another trek through the academic wastelands, self-doubts confirmed: *I’m not good at this, I don’t know this, I’ll never get this.*”

Devereaux and Crovitz believe there’s a way to reframe the teaching of grammar. Rather than focusing on grammatical correctness, with its top-down, negative, schoolmarm associations, they suggest calling this part of the curriculum *language study* and focusing on *grammatical fit*, “with students recognizing the power of specific language choices and the range of rhetorical options for communication, whether academic, professional, social, or personal.”

“Language isn’t a matter of right and wrong,”





continue the authors; “it’s about getting things done by knowing the context and acting intentionally on that information. We have to be confident enough as teachers to face the holes in our own grammar knowledge and curious enough to pay attention to how language works in myriad ways around us.” They believe that changing the label can make a significant difference in how grammar is seen in the classroom:



- **Language study helps students “crack the code” of Standard American English (a.k.a. Academic English), which can be seen as a foreign language in which none of us were raised as native speakers.**
- **Language study focuses on the region between single words and the larger passage – the way writers, speakers, or composers express themselves in a line, stanza, or paragraph.**
- **Language study aligns with ELA goals from kindergarten through college.**
- **Language study accepts students as legitimate language experts in their own right.**

Experts? Really? Yes, say Devereux and Crovitz: “Research indicates that by 18 months, children are mastering basic language structures. By the time they enter high school, students can be quite sophisticated – and even brilliant – with what they can do with words. They’ve used language to talk their way into advantageous situations and out of troublesome ones, to entertain and impress their friends, to counsel, console, and cajole. Their language use identifies them as members of specific communities and cultures, and whether consciously realized or not, they can shift between registers and dialects depending on the situation. They’ve had years of experience processing language, and while they may not know the terminology or be metacognitively practiced, they have a deep familiarity with the structures of English.”

The trick is for ELA teachers to acknowledge students’ inchoate language savvy and leverage it to make grammar an understandable and important part of the broader curriculum. The authors suggest several “low-risk forays into language options, playful

experiments that position students as inquisitive and capable, able to draw usefully on the resources of experience:”

❖ **Manipulating word endings and parts of speech** – Show how adding *-ish* to the noun *child* produces an adjective, *childish*, how adding *-er* to the verb *play* produces a noun, *player*. “First-language speakers know innately which suffix belongs to which lexical category without formal instruction,” say Devereaux and Crovitz. “This can seem miraculous to students, as the meanings seem to emerge from their own minds.” A class might then Google search a list of noun and adjective suffixes, create amusing new words (*monsterism*, *monsterful*, *monsterdom*, *monsterable*, *monsterless*) and invent imaginative sentences (*The monsterless house sat quietly in the woods. Monsterism is the process of creating creatures in the lab.*)

❖ **Understanding adjective sequence** – Native speakers know intuitively that there’s an order in which adjectives should be used – for example, the sentence *Madeline gazed up at the ancient, beautiful, round, big moon* just sounds wrong. Students might be given a group of adjectives for nouns (opinion – best, ugliest; size – small, gigantic; condition – new, wet, torn; age – young, ancient) and asked to sequence them in a way that feels right. They’ll notice commonalities among classmates and see their intuitive grasp of how words interact.

❖ **Thinking about phrases as language chunks** – Our brains process language in phrases and clauses, say Devereaux and Crovitz, and this exercise helps students manipulate language chunks: a class is split into groups and each one must take a long, convoluted sentence and pluck out one, then two, then three words in turn so the sentence still makes sense. The process is then reversed, with groups experimenting with adding words while maintaining the overall sense.

❖ **Using sentence modifiers can tweak the meaning** – Students are asked to write a simple declarative sentence about a recent event and then change the wording of one clause in a way that changes the reader’s reaction to the sentence.







An example: **(a)** The White House released a statement late Tuesday night, expressing disagreement with the judge's ruling. **(b)** The White House released a statement late Tuesday night, blasting the judge's ruling as an "egregious overreach."

❖ **Using complex sentences to nuance an argument** – Devereaux and Crovitz suggest getting high-school students to think through a debate with their parents on driving to a party with friends on a weekend night (your points, their concerns, your counterarguments) and then framing a complex sentence like: The party is several miles out of town; however, I am familiar with the area, and you know that I'm very careful driving at night.

❖ **Using the passive voice to emphasize or deemphasize responsibility** –

"Adolescence and adulthood involve negotiating episodes that deal with guilt, responsibility, and blame," say Devereaux and Crovitz, "and by extension, personal integrity and honor... Most young people are skilled at manipulating sentence structure to highlight or hide their roles when describing particular events...." Students might be asked to write two versions of a note to a friend explaining that a borrowed Frisbee ended up getting lost in a lake. In the first note, you take the blame for losing the Frisbee; in the second, you tell what happened but avoid responsibility. A discussion of whether "the Frisbee got lost" is a lie or a half-truth can be extended to other statements:

- ***I flunked the class vs. the teacher flunked me.***
- ***We broke up vs. I got dumped.***
- ***I got into an accident vs. I wrecked the car.***

Once aware of these nuances, students can seek out other examples in media reports, celebrity statements, political non-apologies, and public confessions.

❖ **Using participial phrases as stage directions** – Students are asked to imagine they are creating directions for actors in a play – for example, adding to the sentence *John picks up the knife* to capture anger and tension – *Shaking with rage, John picks up the knife.*

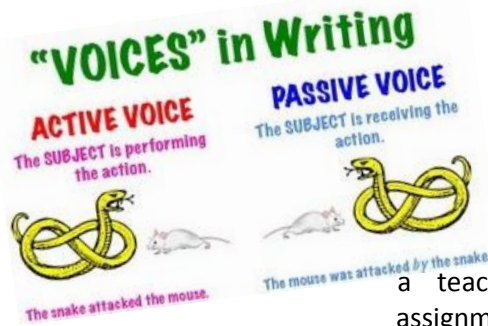
Two others:



- ***The young woman stands near the window. (mood: anxiety)***
- ***The president addresses the reporters (mood: determination)***

What about students whose first language isn't English? Devereaux and Crovitz suggest asking these students about nuances in their native tongues and being genuinely curious about how other languages work to create variations of meaning. For example, a first-language Spanish speaker would say *me gusta*, which literally translates to "it is pleasing to me."

**"Power Play: From Grammar to Language Study" by Michelle Devereaux and Darren Crovitz in *English Journal*, January 2018 (Vol. 107, #3, p. 19-25), <http://bit.ly/2ByiOAZ>; the authors can be reached at [mdeverea@kennesaw.edu](mailto:mdeverea@kennesaw.edu) and [dcrovitz@kennesaw.edu](mailto:dcrovitz@kennesaw.edu).**



## Project-Based Learning in Social Studies

"Sitting in rows of desks listening to a teacher and doing worksheets and textbook assignments is not stimulating, and not how students learn best," says John Larmer (Buck Institute for Education) in this article in *Social Education*. He believes project-based learning is far more likely to engage students and result in long-term retention of key concepts, knowledge, and skills. Sure, there's a place for appropriate lectures (brief), textbook passages, and even worksheets, but Larmer says well-crafted projects should be the heart of a social studies curriculum, connecting students to their communities, preparing them for college and careers, and fostering democratic citizenship.

Projects can be effective from K to 12, lend themselves to interdisciplinary units, and benefit students at all achievement levels and in all types of classes, including Advanced Placement.

There's one more benefit: projects are much more fun to teach. "A good project not only engages students," says Larmer, "it engages teachers, too."





The problem is that projects have a bad name in some quarters because they haven't always been conceived and implemented in ways that garner these benefits.

Some common problems:

- ✚ **Students working in groups with one student doing all the work;**
- ✚ **Parents over-supporting their children;**
- ✚ **"Make something" projects like building a model of the Alamo or a Civil War battlefield diorama or creating a poster of the solar system or a famous inventor;**
- ✚ **Students using commercial materials for projects (in California, Target sells kits for a perennial 4<sup>th</sup>-grade project that asks students to build a model of a Spanish mission);**
- ✚ **Dreary PowerPoint presentations largely copied from websites with no critical thinking or creativity.**



Projects like these don't teach the central content of a unit but serve as a "dessert" or "side dish."

So what does a *good* project look like? In place of the low-rigor, low-effort California build-a-mission project (part of a unit on the Spanish colonial period), Larmer suggests giving students a mocked-up letter from the Archbishop of Mexico, dated 1818, that puts students in the role of advisors asked to decide where the 22<sup>nd</sup> mission ought to be built and what it should look like. Students have two weeks to prepare a presentation for the archbishop demonstrating their knowledge, explaining their rationale, and using visual aids (including a model). This project gets students engaged in learning the history of California's indigenous tribal people, the area's geography, and European colonial expansion.

Larmer and his colleagues have sketched seven elements of what they call a gold-standard project:

- ✚ **A challenging problem or question** – Students need to solve the problem or answer the question, which is posed at an appropriate challenge level.
- ✚ **Sustained inquiry** – Students are engaged in a rigorous, extended process of asking questions, finding resources, and applying information;

- ✚ **Authenticity** – The project includes a real-world context (or a good simulation), tasks and tools, and impact – or it speaks to students' personal concerns, interests, and life issues.

- ✚ **Student voice and choice** – Students are asked to make some decisions about how they work and what they ultimately create.

- ✚ **Reflection** – The projects builds in opportunities to think about the effectiveness of learning experiences and products and how obstacles were overcome (or not overcome).

- ✚ **Critique and revision** – Students get detailed feedback on their process and products based on known standards and rubrics.

- ✚ **Public product** – Students present, display, and explain their work to an audience beyond the classroom.

Larmer concedes that not all projects have all these elements. "The Gold Standard is meant to be aspirational, not a barrier," he says, "Especially if teachers are new to project-based learning." He lists some possible projects:

- ✚ **A debate, speech, social media campaign, or multimedia presentation on a current event or issue – the more local and personally relevant the better;**

- ✚ **A museum exhibit about a historical time, place, person, event, or development;**

- ✚ **A proposal for a monument that explains a historical event or development;**

- ✚ **A simulation of a situation in which people in the past or present have to solve a problem, make a decision, or advise a leader;**

- ✚ **A podcast, guided tour, field guide, or annotated online map about local history;**

- ✚ **An action or service learning project to benefit the community.**



"Project-Based Learning in Social Studies" by John Larmer in *Social Education*, January/ February 2018 (Vol. 82, #1, p. 20-23), [www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org); Larmer can be reached at [johnlarmer@bie.org](mailto:johnlarmer@bie.org); for more information on projects, see [www.bie.org/resources](http://www.bie.org/resources).

