

T-CARE

Teachers Connecting to Advance Retention and Empowerment



Volume 1, Issue 2

Spring 2009

Spring Testing? - Can't STRESS it enough

For our spring newsletter the T-CARE group wanted to focus on the upcoming state standardized testing and some of the other sources of SPRINGTIME STRESS teachers experience. We know this can be an exciting, challenging, and stressful time both for new teachers and for those in the field many years. T-CARE wants to help you experience the GIFTS of the excitement and challenge of this time of year—they make life and work stimulating—but T-CARE hopes to help you reduce the degree to which these “gifts” can sometimes be wrapped in stress and pressure that negatively impact on your

life and work satisfaction. One of the ways the T-CARE project seeks to help teachers is by using techniques derived from an area of research and practice known as Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology focuses on the value of knowing and appreciating our personal strengths. Although it is helpful to be able to recognize one's shortcomings, the field of Positive Psychology stresses that we are more likely to overcome our shortcomings if we are very clear about all of our strengths. Fellows in the Center for Teaching and Learning have enthusiastically embraced these concepts and are using them to

help teachers.

We hope this edition of the newsletter will be chock full of help and support. You deserve it!

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Teacher Attitude and the Art of Exams

Examples of questions of self-doubt that may arise and have the potential to negatively impact your instructional assurance:

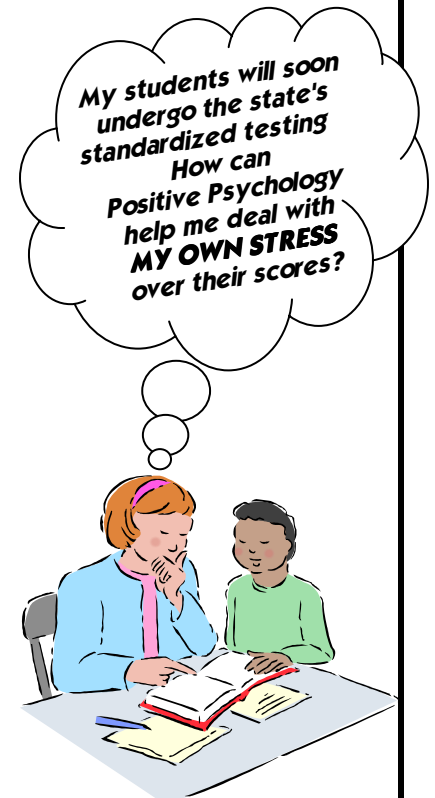
- Did I adequately prepare my students?
- What if they don't improve?
- What will my colleagues think if my pupils don't perform well?

As we witness daily, children are quite intuitive so this perceived lack of confidence may ultimately develop into a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The research clearly indicates

that students enjoy and perform well in subjects which their teacher displays enthusiasm and optimism. First of all you are not alone in these feelings.

There are practical things you can do to help overcome these feelings: Be sure to connect with those experienced teachers around you. Seek out those who are helpful and positive. They can reassure you as well as provide you with tips based on experience. Don't forget to check in with coordinators or special folks at your school site who might also have a wealth of information to share. Think



ahead- don't wait, many of the things you can be doing to help the children can happen along the way- and sooner than you think!

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE GIGGLE?

The War between Superegos and Smiles

Corinne W. Barker, Ph.D.



“We seem to easily forget that fun and laughter is free, immediate, deserved and therapeutic.”

This past holiday season a couple of days before Christmas, I was in the midst of a stressful shopping night with never-ending errands and another mother-daughter debate with my full-fledged sixteen year old teenager. We were returning to our car that was parked next to a main intersection of the parking lot. As I hurriedly started climbing into the front seat (intently focusing on how to perfectly articulate the essence of what I was momentarily trying to teach my child), I tripped and fell backwards into the nearby bushes next to the car door, landing upside down with my feet dangling above my head.

As I lay there tangled with prickly landscape, in plain view of all passersby, I immediately began laughing very hard, thereby making it difficult to reclaim my dignity and balance. I glanced at my teenager who was rolling her eyes in her favorite adolescent style to communicate how I once again was embarrassing her. In addition, however, she was also unable to stifle a huge grin and giggle. In quick seconds of processing my dilemma, relishing the happy moment of contact between my teenager and myself, I realized that if I

didn't quickly and seriously regroup, a good samaritan might feel obligated to assist me. Instead, I chose to relax and enjoy the fun, as my daughter and I laughed together. Suddenly all the tension of the previous hour was released more efficiently than would occur in a prize therapy session. Life again was suddenly fun, and holiday pressures, teen conflicts, and the financial stress of shopping evaporated. The fun persisted all the way home, even to the moments when the event was relayed to my husband who, with respectful amusement, removed pieces of the shrubbery from my hair and derriere.

The incident was not particularly remarkable or unique, but it was momentarily funny in an uncomplicated way for both the participant and reluctant observer. It was simply a delightful, instantaneous break from tension-induced self criticism in the both the parent ("teacher") and the teen ("student"). It was the type of event these days that is suppressed in the interest of teaching or learning, achievement of goals, and persecutorial super-egos (that lacerate one's self-esteem in the name of "maturity"). To soothe our overactive superegos we relentlessly seem to require that we be goal-oriented and perfect -- too often at the expense of laughter. In fact, to be a valid proponent of chuckles, one may even feel we should cite the research verifying its healing effects and productive outcomes. On the other hand, so many

of us seem to have an expansive supply of available content from which to derive our self-criticisms -- none of which requires validation.

For many people, shame and self-blame come readily. The processes of teaching and learning (in the formal as well as informal sense) can become so goal-oriented that laughter is eliminated. Lesson plans are important in life, but reluctance to rigidly adhere to them often carries with it the threat of penalty or failure, thereby creating an atmosphere that obliterates spontaneous smiles. While a healthy superego is necessary (and lessons plans shouldn't be ignored) a spontaneous chuckle about human frailties is not time-consuming.

We seem to easily forget that fun and laughter is free, immediate, deserved and therapeutic. Required "fun", forced silliness, or goal-oriented antics, however, can be just as stressful and sobering as final exams and paying bills because forced laughter is hollow, lonely, and yet another goal to achieve.

On the other hand, quick moments of genuine release from one's self-criticisms and obligations is a gift. In the seconds of turning upside down in a public thoroughfare, there can be a fleeting moment of choice to either worry or giggle.

From personal experience as one who stumbles often, I recommend the giggle.





DEAR DOCS:

"I have almost survived the year, and loved most of it, but I don't feel that I got everything done. Teaching requires so much organization and many times I felt like I was teaching day to day and didn't know what to expect. Now my students will be moving on and I worry they don't know all the things they should."

--Surviving but worrying

Dear *Surviving*,

This is such a great question because it draws our attention to several common concerns. First, it seems like *you are* coping with the common experience of self-doubt. You are not alone in that. The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project (SCNTP) identified six (6) phases of development that most first year teachers experience. The six phases were Anticipation, Survival, Disillusionment, Rejuvenation, Reflection, and then Anticipation, again. As Ellen Moir of the SCNTP noted, in the last six weeks of the school year most first-year teachers engage in the Reflection process in which they ask themselves what worked well and what did not. This process is very helpful and vitally important because it forms the basis for the teacher's evolution

and professional development. But from your question, it seems like you feel like your doubts are not a positive thing. Let's explore that a bit from a psychological perspective.

There are many reasons why we might experience self-doubt but one reason this can happen is that sometimes we define our talents and skills only in the context of comparisons to others. We can be certain that you, did not do some things as well as some other teachers. We can be equally sure that some other teachers got more of this or that done than you did. But we also can be sure you do many things very well and your growth areas do not diminish the value of your achievements. Embrace your achievements.

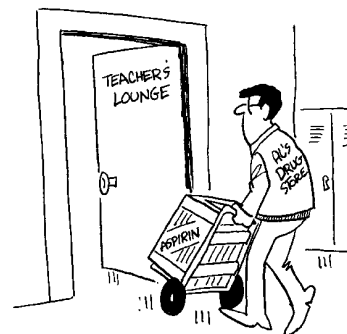
You said that you "loved" most of the first year. Given that, you must have seen the value of helping a student to appreciate that student's strengths. You have no doubt also used this as a way of helping the student to persevere through the more difficult lessons--the "growth areas," as we often call them. Isn't it ironic that you can do this for your students but you are not willing to do this for yourself?

Let's talk about growth for a moment. It may be true that you will grow in terms of your organization and preparedness for class. Can you give yourself permission to experience that growth? And can you do the same for yourself on the subject of what lessons you did or did not complete. Maybe over time you will come to see that what you get done is pretty much in line with what is rea-

sonably possible. Or maybe you will find ways to accomplish more. Either way, it's vital that you allow yourself the opportunity to come to that knowledge. If you are so busy punishing yourself for having growth areas, your search for growth will be slowed and possibly truncated.

Finally, let's talk about student knowledge. The standardized testing process is so stressful for teachers. This is why this topic is addressed in several different ways in this edition of the T-CARE newsletter. First, we really want to encourage you to talk with your colleagues about your fears. If you can find the courage to do that, the experience of others sharing your fear will be healing. You will feel normal because you ARE normal.

But what if, as you fear, you have failed to prepare your students in some way? The short answer is you need to respect your humanity. Respecting your humanity means embracing the human experiences of growth and learning, plus the human experiences of making mistakes or not performing as well on some occasions as you do on other occasions. Doing these things will also help you to like and respect yourself—which is essential if you are going to promote your own growth. But how can you accomplish treating yourself this way? We hope T-CARE can help you.



(continued on page 4)

Doctors Are IN (continued from page 3)

At T-CARE, we believe the relationships we want to help teachers develop with one another will enable them to support each other and advocate effectively on the subject of teacher evaluation and performance.

If teachers engage in an open dialogue on this issue, they will be better able to help administrators and other stake-

holders to understand when the testing is revealing system-wide problems, rather than poor teaching. The question should be based on two related assumptions: first, that the teacher is a highly trained professional and, second, that there is a good explanation for the students' performance difficulties. With T-CARE'S help, we hope to provide avenues

through which teachers will engage in open dialogues with one another and with administrators to ensure that standardized tests and other evaluative tools are used in fair and constructive ways

Dr. Corinne Barker & Dr. Alan Goodwin are Licensed Clinical Psychologists and CTL Fellows. Please submit your questions for **"The Doctors Are In"** to: t-care@csun.edu

FROM THE TRENCHES...

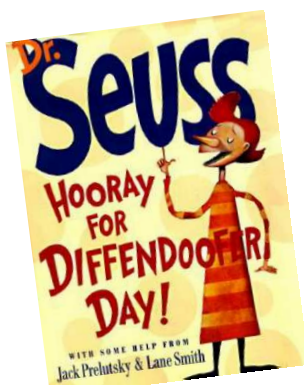
- Reflections of a first year teacher

I graduated from CSUN with a credential in multiple subjects back in spring of 2008. I knew that I was meant to be a teacher through an epiphany in my early 20's (people say I was lucky to find out so young, but it sure doesn't feel that early in my life as my 28th birthday approaches). I was unfortunate to have graduated at a time of economic unrest in the educational field in California. At first I was scorned, then for a period I felt very sad and inferior. Had I spent years of time, money, and effort pur-

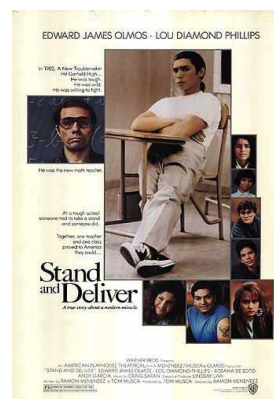
suing education in vein? After graduating, I had the attitude that there were just some jobs I wasn't going to do. A person with my education flipping burgers or serving someone their medium-well prime rib? No way! Not only this, but I wanted a job where I could hone my skills as an educator while being challenged, and perhaps learn something at the same time. Through a friend I heard of an opening with a company in the autism field. I now work as a behavioral therapist and am very

pleased with my job. I make a difference in the community, and it is great experience. I still can't wait to get my own classroom and start my career as a professional educator, but I found something rewarding, challenging, and worthwhile in the meantime. I never pictured my self doing this type of work, but I couldn't be happier with the situation right now. Moral of the story: don't let the current crisis get you down, make the best of it and try to better yourself.

T-CARE Recommends...



This book is based on 14 rough drawings and verses from the genius of Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel. It is an ode to unorthodox, unusually creative teachers, and the innovative thinking they encourage in young minds. (Age 3 and older)



Stand and Deliver (1988)
Edward James Olmos's Oscar-nominated performance energizes this true-life story of a Los Angeles high school teacher who motivated a class full of East L.A. barrio kids to care enough about mathematics to pass an Advanced Placement Calculus Test.



PRINCIPAL'S CORNER,

The weather is warming, plants are budding, there's a certain lilt in our students' walk, and you've got a lump in the pit of your stomach. For most people, spring is in the air and life is good. For teachers, there is the realization that standardized testing time is approaching and there is so much more material to cover!

Standardized tests can be categorized into two major groups: norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. These two tests differ in their intended purposes, the way in which content is selected, and the scoring process which defines how the test results must be interpreted. The discontinued test called the CAT/6 that will not be administered this year was a norm referenced test (NRT). The major reason for using an NRT is to classify students. NRTs are designed to highlight achievement differences between and among students to produce a dependable rank order of students across a continuum of achievement from high achievers to low achievers. School systems might want to classify students in this way so that they can be properly placed in remedial or gifted programs. These types of tests are also used to help teachers select students for different ability level reading or mathematics instructional groups. You may be familiar with NRTs already, the most "popular" being the SAT which is commonly used as a factor in college admissions. The public can tell immediately at a glance how a student ranks among other students in the nation.

The STAR testing that your students will be taking soon is a standardized criterion-referenced test (CRT). CRTs determine what test takers can do and what they know, not how they compare to others. CRTs report how well students are doing relative to a pre-determined performance level on a specified set of educational goals or outcomes included in the school, district, or state curriculum. There are many students that get perfect scores, but you never know how many other students earned perfect scores or where they rank among their peers from a CRT. We do know, however, what students know from these tests, and California places students into knowledge bands based on what they know called Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic. The goal for all students is that they place in proficient or above.

So now that you know more than you wanted to know about standardized testing, what can you do to lose that lump in the pit of your stomach? Here are some tips:

1. **RELAX!** Your students sense your anxiety and may become overly anxious themselves.
2. **Be** sure to teach all the key standards for your grade level.
3. **Review** and cover materials in the state blueprints.
4. **Download** and practice with CDE release test questions.
5. **Allow** practice time so students will be familiar with bubbling in or transferring information to an answer sheet.
6. **Teach** some test taking skills such as not spending too

much time on difficult questions, eliminating answers, choosing one letter (all "Cs") for answers they don't know, answering every question, or drawing out a problem.

7. **Teach** key words such as "all," "now," "always," "never," "only," "exactly."

8. **Teach** students to watch for negative words like "not," "no," "never."

9. **If** you are going to move furniture and need to cover charts, maps, etc., do so several days before test administration so students are comfortable with the environment.

10. **Check** any IEPs for testing accommodations.

11. **Encourage** students to go to bed early before testing. No homework!

12. **Encourage** students to have a healthy breakfast. Avoid fatty or sugary foods.

13. **Be** sure to remind parents to give their children any needed medications.

14. **Have** quiet activities for early finishers which can be completed at their desks. Remind students to stay focused on their tests even if others finish early.

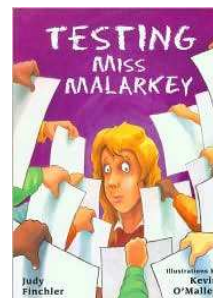
15. **Remind** students to read or listen to directions carefully and to remember sometimes information in one question can help them answer other questions.

Remember that this is just one test of scores that your students will take and that you will administer. Relax and remember to smell the roses. After all, if testing is immanent, can summer be far behind?



Stephen Bluestein is principal of LAUSD's Woodland Hills Elementary a 2008 California Distinguished School.

He has been a teacher and administrator with LAUSD for twenty years.



Read Testing Miss Malarkey, by Judy Finchler to your students for fun



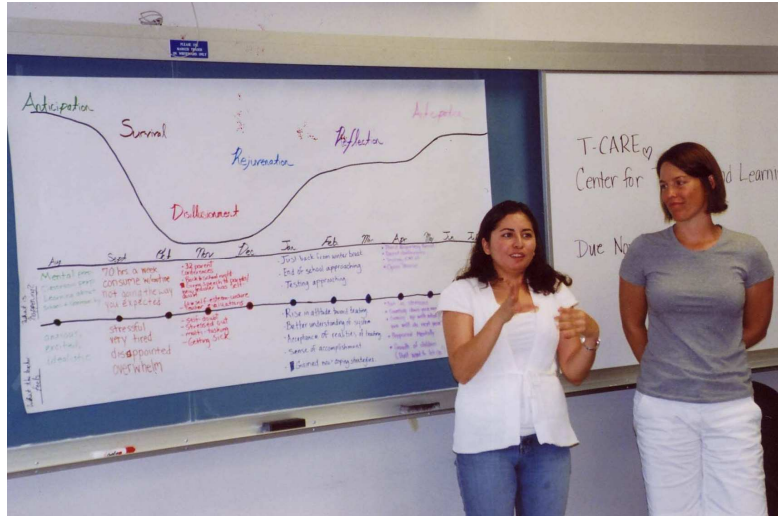
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Look for the next T-CARE newsletter this fall. It's a new semester with new students and new parents, perhaps with new administrators and new colleagues. What are some of the challenges we face at the beginning of each school year?



Second semester seminar students Nidia Menjivar and Jenny Girard participate in the "6 Phases of Beginning Teachers" sharing exercise.

T-CARE is dedicated to help teaching professionals, at all experience levels, to explore the developmental stages in their career. Through this process, T-CARE will endeavor to establish and maintain a close, mutually-supportive network of teaching professionals who will work together to:

- gain a deep appreciation for the challenges all helping professionals confront,
- sensitize teaching professional to the value of cognitive and behavioral self-affirming practices, and
- help them to develop higher levels of resiliency and job satisfaction.

Links to Visit:

Join our Facebook group "CTL at Cal State Northridge"
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www.callutheran.edu/counseling_services/

