

FingerPoints



**The E-Newsletter for "Teaching Is Too Important to Take Seriously" and
"The Five Fingers of Laughter - How to Get a Handle on Your Happiness"**

November 2005 Edition

Random Thoughts of Laughter

Thanks to all the wonderful people I have met over the last few weeks in my speaking engagements in Hartford, CT, Grand Rapids, MI, Indianapolis, IN and Birmingham, AL. They were all great audiences to work with and it was a joy to see all the smiling faces. (To my Birmingham friends, the final tally for Top 5 Reasons Teaching Sucks is listed in Finger 5.) A note on the Teaching Sucks poll. As you know if you have read the book, Teaching Sucks is the first section of the book and after completing the checklist you are to rip it out and throw it away. The idea is that 90% of the things listed we have no control over and by writing them down and wadding them up, it creates a constructive way to deal with our natural frustrations. It also allows us to move beyond these frustrations. Another benefit shown over and over again by people taking the poll is that it shows us we are not alone in wanting to laugh in the classroom and in life. As you know from my book and presentations, we cannot sit back and let life control us, because it is too important, especially when we are teaching. Our job as educators affect people in so many ways that we will never know. Therefore we need to make sure we give all of our students the skills they need to excel and one of the most important skills is laughing at life. Each one of us have more than enough reasons to not laugh, but actually it is because of those reasons that we must laugh. Remember, we don't laugh because life has been perfect for us, we laugh because it is continually imperfect.

Keep Laughing and Keep Teaching,

Scott Endres



Laughter is Good

If you don't believe that laughter is good for you, read on. The University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) has been studying connections between laughter and heart disease for several years. Just this year they released a new report that shows laughter is linked to the healthy function of blood vessels. In the study, participants' overall average blood flow increased 22% during the laughter situations presented. Numbers aside here is what it means straight from the doctor's mouth. Dr. Michael Miller, director of preventative cardiology at UMMC, said, "The magnitude of change we saw is similar to the benefit we might see with aerobic activity, but without the aches and pains. We don't recommend that you laugh instead of exercise, but we do recommend that you try to laugh on a regular basis. Thirty minutes of exercise three times a week and 15 minutes of laughter on a daily basis is good for the vascular system." I couldn't have said it better myself. Really, because I'm not a doctor.



Practice PHWH

Okay, so we need to laugh more. How do we do it? While there are several ideas in the Laughter Exercise Plan in the back of my book, I would like to mention one little thing I have done which I guarantee will help. For the month of November, let's turn off the negative talk radio and TV shows. And I'm not talking about left or right here, because these shows are on all sides. I used to listen to these type of shows, especially in the morning when I went to work, but I realized even though I agreed with what they were saying, they were leaving me in a very negative mood. That is why I made a conscious switch to listening to the "wacky" DJs that every city has. If the comedy on those shows was bad then I would listen to CDs of old radio comedy shows which I picked up cheaply at various places. I found out that this was a great way to start the day off right (or left depending on your politics.) This way, when I walked in the door of my school I wasn't upset about the problems of my world, but was laughing and in the right mood to help with my students in their world.



Smile, Damn It! Smile!

I don't watch as much TV as I used to but there is one new show that I am hooked on called *My Name Is Earl*. I watch it because it is the TV version of Smile, Damn It! Smile! The show's premise is built around the main character, Earl, trying atone for all the bad things he has done in his life. He starts doing this after learning about karma (from Carson Daly no less) and believes that if good things are to happen in his life he must first do good. This is the Earl version of the *Law of Conservation of Smiling* I talk about in the book. If we want more smiling and laughter in our lives, then we must start the chain ourselves. If we do this, then the laughter and smiling will come back to us greater than what we gave. I know this is just a TV show, but as I write in the book I have experienced it myself with telling people to Have A Good Day. So if you are on the Laughter Exercise Plan and are looking for a comedy show to meet your requirement, check out *My Name Is Earl*. Not only will you be helping yourself Practice PHWH but it could help us all Smile, Damn It! Smile!



Allow Yourself to Laugh

As I continually stress in workshops, closely tied to being able to allow yourself to laugh is the idea that we need to admit our mistakes and let our students see them. A recent mistake I made drove this idea home in some new ways. I had made a mistake on some papers that all the teachers were giving to their students. When I realized the mistake, I immediately sent an email to the entire school to let them know about it. When I signed the note, for some reason I put "Admitting mistakes daily since 1991" on the end of it. The response I got was overwhelming. It ranged from empathy to appreciation for admitting a mistake in public to people writing that it was the funniest thing they had seen in a while and that the laughter really brightened their day. It reminded me once again, that no matter how hard it is to do, admitting your mistakes to yourself and to others almost always has a positive effect. Even though you may not have a clue what that positive effect is going to be.



Laugh at the World Around You

In a recent New York Times article (10/27/05) comedian Jerry Lewis, 80, was talking about laughter and life. Lewis, who has had numerous health problems over the last several years said "It'll keep you alive for another ten years if you give yourself a laugh once a day: either provoke it, or look around in the wildest laboratory in the world, the public." While his comment could fit with several of the Five Fingers, I put here to remind us that the best place to find laughter when we need it is from the world around us. The key is to open our eyes to the funny things in life and not be afraid to laugh.

With that, I present the final results from the NCTM Birmingham poll we conducted. The Top 5 Reasons Teaching Sucks are:

1. Not being able to go to the bathroom when you want to
2. Lack of time
3. Low pay
4. State testing
5. Feeling like a non-professional professional

Honorable Mention: Students arriving at your house & walking in while you are in your pajamas (Thanks Lunetta of AL)

The Stuff at the End that Nobody Ever Reads

Be sure to check out www.paperwadideas.com to get more information about *Teaching Is Too Important to Take Seriously* and to find out about PaperWad Ideas. If you like boring and useless professional development then PaperWad Ideas is not for your school, but if you are looking for something different, check us out. We are career educators who are committed to education excellence and to enjoying everything we do. That is why we say Toss Aside Normal Professional Development.

Finally, please feel free to email me about the experiences you are having laughing in your classroom and in your life. I have always believed good teaching is just good stealing. When we see something that works for one teacher, we steal it and use it in our classroom. So if something is working for you, let me know and I will share it with everyone else through the newsletter. I have no problem being a Laughter Fence, or maybe a Laughter Dealer, or how about a Laughter Launderer. Anyway until next month, Have A Good Day!