



Building a Teacher's Tool Box
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Time has been flying over the last few weeks, since we last met. In Salem, where I teach, we are done for the year in ABE! We finished last night, and now we will convene once again for our annual "End-of-the-year" celebration. It is always a time of celebration to join with each other and recap the successes of the year. It always amazes me how proud all of the students are over their accomplishments, whether it be in ABE, ESOL, or at our program, the program for adults with developmental disabilities.

This past week, I also attended the retirement of Linda Swenson, who works in adult ed and has serviced so many students and teachers in her career as a consultant to the TANF teachers first, and then as an LD resource consultant. She will be greatly missed by all those that she worked with directly and indirectly. Thank you, Linda.

On Thursday morning of last week, I also zipped over to Manchester School of Technology to see first hand the cultural fair that the students plan and perform at, as well as cook foods from their native countries. I have never attended before, and it was fantastic! I know that my sons would have loved to have seen the Sudanese Cultural Dancers. That was out of this world! It makes me stop and think about my culture and what it is that I have to share with others about who I am.

I have also been wrapping up my research for my mini grant on Differentiated Instruction. In the process, I came across this humorous story about a teacher and a neurosurgeon. I did not use the story in my mini grant, but I did want to share it with you. I think after all this rain we can all use a chuckle.

"Do you know the story about the well known educator who was talking with the prominent neurosurgeon? The educator said that the decisions teachers make are more important and more difficult than the decisions made in any other profession. The story goes that the neurosurgeon wasn't so sure about that. "How can you say that the decisions a teacher

makes are more important and more difficult than decisions made in any other profession?”, and he wanted to know why. “Look, at me. I operate on the brain. I’ve got life and death right there on the table in front of me.” The famous educator responded, “Yes, sir, but you operate on one patient at a time, and that patient is anesthetized!”

But, lastly, what I most want to share with all of you is something that happened to me on Mother’s Day, and I am telling as many people who will listen, and then we will get to the maelstrom discussion that ensued of last week’s blogging question and then onto this week’s question.

Before I begin to tell you my story, I must preface it with, “do you know the story of the USS Indianapolis”? If not, the beginning of the story might fall a little flat for you. If you don’t, think back to the movie “Jaws”. (To those of you who have been reading my newsletter for quite some time now, you know that Memorial Day weekend is coming, and my husband and I will be watching “Jaws”, but I digress.)

In “Jaws”, the old sailor, Quint, is telling Sheriff Brody and the scientist, Mr. Hooper, a story about one of his scars. He tells them that it was a navy ship delivering the bomb, and 900 men went into the water, the sharks came, and only 300 men made it out alive.

This you need to know about my story...

On Mother’s Day, my family and I went to Hampton Beach for a few hours, and after that we left and went to a five star restaurant in Amesbury, MA, which was Burger King!

While we were there, an older man came into the restaurant, and he held the door open for an elderly man. The first thing I noticed about the elderly man was his walker, and then I noticed his hat~the USS Indianapolis! I could not believe that my eyes were seeing what they were seeing! We study this every year at Salem Adult Ed; I can recite for you statistics by heart: 1,196 men were on board, the ship was hit by Japanese torpedoes, the ship sank in 12 minutes, about 300 men went down with the ship, about 900 men were left in shark infested waters for four days, and only 316 men survived. How could I be seeing one of the survivors at Burger King in Amesbury, MA? What is the mathematical probability of that? After all those years to find a survivor of such a tragedy? I was speechless!

After spying on the two men during the course of their meal, I finally decided to take some action. As they were preparing to leave, I told my family what I was going to do.

We all went over and I asked the younger of the two if the older man was his father, and he said "yes". I then asked the elderly man if he had indeed been on the USS Indianapolis. He responded, that yes he had. He stood a little straighter when he said it, and his face light up when I told him I worked in the GED program and that we studied WWII every year, and that episode in history in particular. I did not have any more words...it was just such an amazing experience to be in the presence of a real hero. All the elderly man would say about his ordeal was that he was chosen to do the mission since "she" was the fastest ship.

My husband thanked the man for serving and I told our sons that this man was a true hero.

The son told us that his father had also been at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked, but due to an injury, he was not on board the USS Arizona. This just blew my mind. How could one man be at such pivotal events in our history, and be a survivor?

I asked them if they lived in Amesbury and they said that they did. The dad asked where we lived and I said that they probably would not have heard of the town that I live in, Pelham, but wouldn't you know, the son gets his taxes done in Pelham! What a small world!

The son told us that his dad grew up in the West Virginia and Kentucky area, and that he and his mom lived here after the war.

Just before they left, his son did something weird, though. The dad had a walker, and the son turned a medical bracelet that was attached to it. I don't know if he did it on purpose so that we could see the name, but I caught a flash of it. It looked like either "B" or "D" and then the first letters of the last name were "Thom".

The trip from Amesbury to our home was the longest of my life! The first thing I did when I got home was "Google" the USS Indianapolis survivors list, and would you believe that way down the list, there was a "David Thomson" who was a survivor! Again, I was dumbfounded!

Since Mother's Day, I am telling everyone that I meet about this. My students at Salem were amazed since we talk about this a lot. This past Monday we watched the movie, "The Mission of the Shark", which is

available through "Netflix", and it was truly difficult to watch knowing that men had to endure this and that I had actually talked with a man who survived this. How do you then carry on with your life after an event like that?

My only regret in all of this is that I did not take a picture of him, or shake his hand, or truly find out what his name really was.

So now, I think, that I have told enough people...

Now, to the crux of the newsletter...

My blogging question to you last week produced a maelstrom of response, mostly by email. It seems that the definition of fair struck a nerve with many of you. Maybe it is my lack of use of that word that it didn't strike me the way it struck many of you professionally and personally.

I know that growing up we never used the "f" word...I guess my brothers and I just assumed it was all good and what was being done was the way it was supposed to be. In my teaching career, I can honestly say that I have never had a student say, "that's not fair". Maybe I have been lucky, or maybe it is that the way my class is designed is by following universal design. Maybe it has been the dynamics of the class, and maybe it is that I hold all of the students to their highest potential. I don't know.

For me, "fair" does not have a negative connotation that it seemed to have for many of you. To me, fair is looked at what my students need to have or get to be successful, but it is NOT a free ticket to do nothing or poor quality work.

For me, fair is accommodations that would be found on IEP's or for the GED accommodations, such as word banks, extended time, preferential seating, testing in a separate room. Fair would never be for me to excuse students from tasks "just because it's not fair". Students in my classes need to work to their best of their ability and earn their successes. We do not benefit as a whole, and the students do not benefit individually when we go "easy" on them. That would not be fair! They would be shortchanged of so many opportunities!

So, because of the maelstrom of last week, I have decided to go easy on you, and me, this week!

The blogging question is: how do you celebrate the end of the year with your students? What do you do that is special to honor your student's accomplishments?

My address to my blog is: <http://nhldnews.wordpress.com>

Please join me and see what I think about this. Again, if you are not comfortable with going out to my blog, please email me and let me know what you think and I will get back to you via email, and with your permission I will post what you said to me.

You can also access my blog from the Adult Education website, which is: www.nhadulted.org