

**Title of Session:** Teaching Teachers  
**Moderator:** Dianne Allen  
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Room: Teaching Teachers Group

**DianneA:** Welcome to today's Teaching Teachers session

**DianneA:** we will get underway formally in a minute or so's time

**DianneA:** till then check out the whiteboard and see if that spurs you on

**DianneA:** OK, to make things comfortable for people, check that you have your chat space detached, and your larger text selected

**DianneA:** and then introduce yourselves - where you are, and what stage of teaching you are involved in

**GaryML:** My name is Gary and I'm currently a 7th grade Texas History teacher in San Antonio

**DianneA:** I am based in Wollongong Australia and I teach pre-service teachers

**GaryML:** I've only been teaching for 2 years

**DianneA:** thanks Gary

**BJB2:** I'm a communications teacher in Pennsylvania

**DianneA:** thanks BJ

**DianneA:** Juan?

**DianneA:** February is the academic new year for Australians

**DianneA:** So I thought I would open up today's session for input to members about what concerns they have that might form the basis of discussions for today or for sessions in the near future

**DianneA:** have either of you got items you'd like to discuss?

**GaryML:** Does it seem that your school district in Australia is out of touch with what is happening in the classroom or is it just me here in Texas?

**BJB2:** How do you mean, Gary?

**GaryML:** Well it just seems that they are passing all this ridiculous legislation without understanding what teachers put up with day in and day out in the classroom

**BJB2** nods.

**DianneA:** Gary, I have been in and out of teaching since 1966, that level of disconnect hasn't changed much in those years

**GaryML:** There is so much pressure because of standardized testing that this is all schools and districts care about

**DianneA:** indeed, I see that as a dilemma across more than the classroom

**DianneA:** I would express it this way ...

**GaryML:** Our principal told us the other day we have to pass kids on to the next grade level no matter what if they pass TAKS (the Texas State assessment)

**DianneA:** that the bureaucracy of the public service has developed to the stage where it is generating things for its own sake, ...

**DianneA:** not for the sake of the service it is supposed to be supporting

**DianneA:** whether it be teaching, medical care ... whatever

**DianneA:** now the question for me is: how can I help Gary address what is happening for him in Texas

**DianneA:** how does what you principal said create problems for you, Gary?

**GaryML:** Well I don't think we should be teaching kids they can coast throughout the year, fail everything, but then pass one test and move on. Things don't work like that in the real world

**DianneA** nods

**DianneA:** so how does what the principal said create that kind of expectation, for you?, for your children?

**GaryML:** but the school and district doesn't care. That one test makes them money so that is what they emphasize...problem kid so what, let the next school handle him/her

**DianneA:** how does the test 'make them money'?

**GaryML:** Schools are granted certain status in Texas by how they perform on the TAKS. The better the performance the better the status, the more funds they receive

**DianneA:** And what does the TAKS examine? and what does the TAKS overlook?

**GaryML:** It's a yearly assessment that tests the criteria set forth by the Texas Education Agency to make sure every student is learning the required material

**DianneA** nods

**GaryML:** They test Math and reading every year

**DianneA** nods

**GaryML:** with science, social studies, and writing every few years

**DianneA** nods

**DianneA:** in what way is the 'real world' different to this, Gary?

**BJB2:** do you find that your curriculum is test driven?

**GaryML:** Well if I was a slacker at work who never handed in or finished my assignments on time I'd be fired...My bosses wouldn't say "He did great on that one thing, so let's keep him around"

**DianneA:** and you think that your principal is 'letting the side down'?

**DianneA:** perhaps I should phrase that differently ...

**GaryML:** I think it's wrong to educate a student for a full year for one 40 question test, I think there's a lot more to seeing if a student is prepared to move on to the next level

**DianneA:** can I ask a few more detail questions ...

**GaryML:** sure

**DianneA:** when did the principal say what you have found unrealistic?

**GaryML:** at last week's faculty meeting

**DianneA:** so it was spoken to staff, and not to students?

**GaryML:** yes

**DianneA:** Ok, let me ask BJ and David, as two more experienced teachers ...

**DianneA:** have you heard principals say what Gary's principal has said

**BJB2:** Dianne, this is all part of No Child Left Behind

**DianneA** nods

**DianneA:** so elaborate for me a little more about what you see to be the implications

**DianneA:** we had a prime minister who said that by the year 2000 no child would be living in poverty!

**DavidWe** reads back

**BJB2:** NCLB is supposed to level the playing field and all children will be reading at grade level

**DavidWe** agrees with Gary, but, there is a huge push for testing these days

**DianneA:** Of course, one way to get 'good' academic results is to focus on the 'exam'

**BJB2:** being focused on testing doesn't allow teachers to differentiate learning

**DianneA:** that is not 'education' in its broadest sense

**BJB2:** to take into account different learning styles, multiple intelligences, and special needs children

**DianneA:** so I think Gary, you are among 'friends' here, in that regard

**BJB2** nods. The good news is that if you hang in long enough...

**GaryML:** well it's hypocritical- on one sense principals are telling us the best classrooms are the ones where kids are actively learning and are engaged, but then they are telling us that they better do well on these 40 questions

**DianneA:** we aspire to the fullest possible growth and development of every child

**BJB2:** they'll come up with a new initiative

**BJB2** . o O ( may not be any better, but it will be different )

**DianneA:** so, we do need to clarify one thing ...

**BJB2** listens

**DianneA:** does going for full and proper development really compete with the 40 question test targets?

**GaryML:** absolutely not

**DianneA:** then, where is your problem?

**BJB2** wonders that also

**GaryML:** Maybe I'm just a history buff - but I think Americans should know Valley Forge, Yorktown, Gettysburg, Antietam, etc. And right now (in Texas) they aren't being taught about it b/c it won't be on the TAKS

**DianneA:** does it lie with the fear that others might focus more on the 40 questions than the broader development, and so do better at that test?

**GaryML:** We're educating a generation of kids on how to just get by and know the bear minimum

**DianneA** nods

**DianneA:** are the kids happy with the bare minimum?

**BJB2** . o O ( those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it )

**GaryML:** I've had GT kids tell me they hate the curriculum... which leads to the other problem: The A students are suffering b/c teachers have to slow the lessons down to make sure the lower kids are getting the minimum, so we are dumbing down the smart kids too!

**DianneA** nods to BJ

**DianneA** nods to Gary

**DianneA:** yes I think there are times when we sell children very short

**DianneA:** and we do not challenge them enough and find out their real capabilities

**DianneA:** and the more the curriculum focuses on Math and reading the less it prepares them for real life

**DianneA:** and they know it!

**GaryML:** There are serious problems with NCLB that will be felt when this generation gets to college and expects things handed to them

**BJB2** agrees

**DianneA:** Gary, what was the response to the principal's comment in the faculty meeting?

**GaryML:** Some teachers spoke up and weren't happy with the decision, but the principal pretty much shot them down saying it was a district initiative and we had to follow suit

**DavidWe:** It's going to depend on what the principal is willing to do, I think

**DianneA:** so the district 'kudos' depends on your results as well ..?

**BJB2:** kudos and funding

**DavidWe** smiles

**GaryML:** exactly, and we are one of the top 2 districts in San Antonio - and district officials want to stay that way b/c it lines their pockets

**DianneA:** This sort of thing is happening in Australia, with Higher School Certificate results reporting and school gradings!

**DianneA:** so much can be distorted by that kind of focus, and the way results are statistically analysed

**DianneA:** it has got to the point where the universities are now looking for other tools to test their prospective entrants

**DianneA:** Gary, how did you feel about the whole situation?

**DianneA:** demoralised? wanting to do something? worried? .. ????

**DavidWe** smiles

**DavidWe** . o O ( all of the above? )

**GaryML:** I can't stand it, I feel like I can't make a difference

**DianneA:** Ok David, but I was going to focus on one at a time!

**GaryML:** and that's why I started teaching

**DianneA** nods to Gary

**DianneA:** 'making a difference' is probably the aim of every true and good teacher

**DianneA:** can the principal stop you from 'making a difference'?

**GaryML:** No, b/c I don't teach a TAKS tested subject if I did, then probably

**DianneA:** actually ... you probably do teach within the TAKS area ... you did say they test reading ... you do use reading in history??

**DianneA:** and enthusing the children to read history for its own sake, your enthusiasm, will make them better and wider readers

**GaryML:** that is true

**DianneA:** as well as budding historians

**GaryML:** I think I'm making a difference, I hope students are enjoying the way I teach and finding a new fond likeness for History

**DianneA:** I agree that sometimes these politically driven enthusiasms can be framed in such a way as to tap our energies, to demoralise us

**DianneA:** what we then need, is the company of friends to remind us what it is really about

**BJB2** smiles.

**DavidWe:** Indeed

**BJB2:** so, you need to log in to Tapped In more often, Gary!

**DianneA:** and to rethink how what we do helps ... within our main objective, to make a difference ...

**DianneA:** and in also, by the way, meeting other less sensible objectives, like the 40 question test

**DianneA:** but there are times when we may have to work at another level ...

**DianneA:** to do something about the 'politically driven enthusiasms' ...

**DianneA:** while still holding on to our main and first objective .. to help make a difference in the lives of the children we teach

**DianneA:** that's a difficult balancing act

**DianneA:** because the political and the bureaucratic can gobble you up

**DianneA:** so how might the conversation here, Gary, best help you do what you consider to be the best for your children?

**GaryML:** Well I have to just keep chugging along and do what needs to be done both for my job & the students

**BJB2** cheers for Gary

**GaryML:** But I definitely won't do this forever

**DianneA:** Is there a topic we might explore here in Teaching Teachers, next month, that would support you to do that?

**DavidWe** listens

**BJB2** . o O ( and we wonder why teachers get burned out after 5 years and leave the profession )

**DianneA:** for instance .. have you been involved in one of Michael's social studies sessions?

**GaryML:** no I have not

**BJB2:** next Wednesday is a biggie, Gary!

**BJB2:** check the calendar

**DianneA:** thanks Bj

**GaryML:** I'll keep it in mind, I have to do one chat a week for my Masters courses

**DianneA:** I think we can all recommend that session as one that will help think about teaching history and how to do that better

**DianneA:** it therefore contributes to the other objective

**DavidWe:** Gary, come to Michael's Social Studies Forum next Wednesday

**BJB2:** The next Teaching Teachers discussion will be on March 1

**BJB2:** we have reached the end of our hour already, Dianne!

**DianneA** nods to BJ

**DianneA:** happens all too quickly!

**GaryML:** I'll be there on Wednesday, and I'll try to make it back to this one on March 1st

**DavidWe:** It is almost always a terrific discussion - Michael has several people from the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission

**DianneA** nods to Gary, thanks for sharing your concern

**BJB2** heads for the Teachers in Training discussion.

**DavidWe:** Thanks, Dianne

**DianneA** waves bye to Bj and David

**GaryML:** Thanks for your time Diane

**DavidWe:** Take care, Dianne

**DianneA:** you're welcome Gary