

Title of Session: A Better 3 R's for Middle School: Relevance, Rigor, and Relationships

Moderator: Jim Lerman

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Room: Jim Lerman's Office

BJB2: Welcome to the first meeting of A Better 3Rs!

DavidW cheers

BJB2: Jim has a lot to share. He's posted the information on the whiteboard and as a featured file, but will also share the urls during the discussion

JimLerman: I guess it's time to begin

BJB2: we usually start all Tapped In discussions with introductions. Please tell Jim where you are located and what brings you to this discussion

BJB2 . o O (then you can begin ;-)

JimLerman: ok

BonnieHa: I teach 7th/8th grade language arts in a suburb of Chicago.

BJB2: I teach communication in Pennsylvania and most of my students are middle school level

DavidW: I'm David Weksler. I'm one of the HelpDesk volunteers and I lead a math education discussion in Tapped In. I'm in New Jersey, near New York City

EmilieGst1: Ben Lomond, CA - learning about tapped in for a tech class in the education program at UC Santa Cruz

DavidW . o O (go banana slugs!)

EmilieGst1)

BJB2 hands the virtual floor over to Jim...want to introduce yourself, Jim?

JimLerman: hi guys

JimLerman: I'm a former middle school teacher and have had a lot of different jobs. presently I'm coordinator of the nj consortium for middle schools at Kean Univ.

JimLerman: I'm also an adjunct at Kean and at William Paterson Univ. in ed leadership as well. I've written several books on the internet in ed.

JimLerman: so much for that

JimLerman: glad we're all together

DavidW agrees

JimLerman: I'd like to start off by saying a little something about the title of the event

JimLerman: A better 3 Rs for education: relevance, rigor, and relationships.

JimLerman: I've borrowed this and massaged it a bit from the Gates foundation, which uses the motto rigor, relevance and relationships as what's needed for better secondary schools

DavidW . o O (all 3 start with "R", too)

JimLerman: David I can see why you're on the help desk!

DavidW bows humbly

BJB2 chuckles...let's us keep an eye on him ;-)

JimLerman: I think one of the reasons why middle schools (MS's from now on to save all our fingers) have such difficulty educating kids today (aside from the obvious reasons of what the kids are going through is that the curriculum is off base

BJB2 hopes Jim is going to expand on that statement

JimLerman: it emphasizes rote learning and memorization of academic factoids at the expense of meaning, personal involvement and creativity

BJB2: any questions so far?

BJB2 wonders if Bonnie and Emilie agree with that comment?

JimLerman: I'm not a total touchy-feely kind of person, but I think that the rituals of education have taken the place of relevance. We teach things because they've always been taught...quadratic equations, geometry, the periodic table, not because they necessarily contribute to students' understanding of life and experience

JimLerman: end of soapbox

JimLerman: how do people feel about that?

DavidW likes the periodic table

EmilieGst1: I don't have much teaching experience yet, so I'm not sure

BJB2: how does this viewpoint mesh with NCLB and standards, Jim?

JimLerman: I take back what i said about you before David

DavidW . o O (uh-oh!)

EmilieGst1: (though I do like my periodic table too!)

BJB2 smiles.

DavidW: I was a chemistry major - I REALLY do like the Periodic Table...but you shouldn't have to MEMORIZE it

BonnieHa: Well, sometimes things have to be taught that way...punctuation rules, etc. How does one foster more personal involvement and creativity?

DavidW believes that is why many people dislike chemistry

BJB2 hopes the Periodic Table discussion won't derail the entire discussion.

BJB2: good question, Bonnie. Why do we have to teach those rules though?

BJB2 . o O (and is there a better way to teach rules other than worksheets?)

JimLerman: thank you David and Bonnie, not having to memorize the table is exactly the point, knowing how to use it and what it's good for is more important. with today's access to information, we can find the table itself whenever we need

JimLerman: so to get to the point of tonight's exploration

JimLerman: I've selected a number of websites that show up on your whiteboard that illustrate to me a better, more engaged and more meaningful way for kids to participate in school

BonnieHa: I'm digging Bubbleshare!

JimLerman: you don't have to agree with what I said before...just wanted you all to know where I'm coming from

BonnieHa: I understand.

JimLerman: the idea is to get students creating and applying knowledge rather than just consuming it

BonnieHa: Ohhh, Writing Fix looks terrific, too!

JimLerman: one thing in particular that ms students need is to gain an appreciation for what they are capable of doing now, not at some point in the distant future when they've finished going to school

JimLerman: ok Bonnie, you're doing great

BJB2: Emilie, are you finding the urls for the sites Bonnie is mentioning?

EmilieGst1: yes, thanks

BJB2: <http://bubbleshare.com> (Bubbleshare)

BJB2: Writing Fix www.writingfix.com

JimLerman: what I'd like you guys to do is each take a site and spend about 4 minutes looking thru it. As you go thru it, think about how you might use the site to contribute to relevance, rigor, and relationships with your students

JimLerman: Here are all the sites

JimLerman: Bubbleshare

JimLerman: Create, save, and share narrated slide shows totally online.

JimLerman: <http://bubbleshare.com>

JimLerman: Historic Maps in K-12 Classrooms.

JimLerman: How to teach using primary source maps. Don't miss the Map Analysis Worksheet in the "Reading Historic Maps and General Resources on Cartography" area.

JimLerman: <http://www3.newberry.org/k12maps>

JimLerman: Historical Scene Investigation

JimLerman: Nine specific case studies teach students how to do history using primary sources.

JimLerman: <http://www.wm.edu/hsi/index.html>

JimLerman: Teaching Social Skills in the Language Arts Curriculum

JimLerman: Resources to teach social skills as a seamless part of reinforcing the language arts curriculum.

JimLerman: <http://www.cccoe.net/social/opening.htm>

JimLerman: 21st Century Information Fluency Project

JimLerman: How to find, evaluate and use digital information effectively, efficiently and ethically

JimLerman: <http://21cif.imsa.edu/>

JimLerman: WritingFix

JimLerman: Excellent collection of hundreds of writing tools, prompts, wordplays, and exercises

JimLerman: www.writingfix.com

JimLerman: Bonnie, which one are you taking? David? Emilie?

EmilieGst1: 21st century info fluency

JimLerman: cool

JimLerman: David, Bonnie?

DavidW is also looking at 21st century fluency but can switch

BJB2: I looked at Teaching Social Skills <http://www.cccoe.net/social/opening.htm>

BonnieHa: Sorry, I'm at Writing Fix.

JimLerman: Yes, try to take a different one, I don't think you will all get to look at all the sites in the time we're together tonight. What I'd like each person to do is write a few sentences about what they think is good about the site and how they might use it so that all of us here can see what you think

JimLerman: is everyone ok with doing this?

BJB2 nods

DavidW nods

DavidW looks at the map site

BJB2 looks at Trigger Points and Buttons

BonnieHa: Writing Fix offers great opportunities for journaling with students....offers them excellent starters. I like how poetry and lyrics are tied in.

BJB2: I like that Tolerating Differences uses the Teaching Tolerance site

JimLerman: great Bonnie, how does this contribute to promoting relevance for the kids

BonnieHa: It ties in their life experience, their voice, into their writing. The site hopes to inspire.

JimLerman: and what might one need to look out for in order to sure that the experience is academically rigorous on not just fun?

EmilieGst1: 21st century is a good one - there is such easy access to all kinds of information these days, and sometimes it can be difficult to discern a quality resource from a poor resource (eg whitehouse.org vs whitehouse.gov)

JimLerman: great Emilie. how can this be made relevant for students?

DavidW: The historic map site is superb for giving anyone a sense of what one is trying to do by creating a map - providing a lot of information in a compact way and making it as clear as possible - looking at maps over time to understand how further exploration leads to refinement (sometimes you have to guess) - How one presents information is important and may also indicate something about one's culture

EmilieGst1: well, students are likely to look up more info on topics they're interested in (and will be required to do so for many of their classes) - the 21st century site can help them filter out the more relevant (and accurate) info

EmilieGst1: it encourages online research, but at the same time helps students to realize that not all of the info they will find will help them in understanding a subject

JimLerman: And Emilie, what steps might we need to take to make sure that what they're looking for is more meaningful than trivial?

JimLerman: David, how can we move that understanding into some kind of present day applicability for students?

DavidW: have students make a map about something in their local surroundings

DavidW: . o O (how much free space was available in my town - 10, 25, 50, 100 years ago)

JimLerman: what could they map that might have changed over time?

JimLerman: duh, well you answered my question before I asked it. What a terrific student you are!

JimLerman: David and Emilie, how can we build into the activities something that would have the students focus on building better interpersonal relationships?

JimLerman: Bonnie, too, you are not forgotten

BonnieHa: I'm good! :>)

DavidW thinks about better interpersonal relationships

JimLerman: Bonnie, what did you like about bubbleshare? can you describe it for the rest of us?

BonnieHa: Checking it out now...

DavidW: well, it starts to get a bit touchy - but if one starts to map things like ethnic group, religious affiliation, etc., there may be interesting realizations

JimLerman: could map making/reading be used to explore any kind of problem in the community that might require a solution, David

DavidW . o O (red-lining by banks)

JimLerman: bingo

EmilieGst1: not sure if I'm answering your question...upon doing a research project, students could have a dialogue about their sources - the researcher's peers would critique their research methods and sources....

JimLerman: for sure, Emily

DavidW: Yes, I think, because it deals with real data, map-making allows for students to look at real things...placement of waste facilities, industry, parks, etc.

BonnieHa: I love to use images with writing...a pix is a 1,000 words. This is cool because you can share "stories".

JimLerman: what about if the item under research were of different importance to different people, such as participation in athletics by girls...how might that affect relationships, Emilie?

EmilieGst1: ahhh

BonnieHa: I'm wondering if it's appropriate for middle schoolers to view, access, etc....to get past our filters.

DavidW: Jim, I don't know if I responded to your posting to the WWWEDU mailing list about videos, but some VERY compelling student-produced videos were shown as part of the closing keynote address at NECC this year

JimLerman: yes, I saw them from Mabry middle school in Ga

DavidW smiles

EmilieGst1: well, students would have to consider and understand both sides of the debate

JimLerman: and how might that affect relationships? positively or negatively, Emilie?

EmilieGst1: and understand the biases, etc behind their own and others' positions

EmilieGst1: positively, I would think

JimLerman: David, they're terrific aren't they?

DavidW: excellent

JimLerman: absolutely Emilie

EmilieGst1: being able to understand others' viewpoints without becoming inflammatory

DavidW: I think in addition to learning, the students have a real sense of accomplishment - they've produced something

JimLerman: and the necessity for polite dialog while agreeing to disagree if necessary

JimLerman: yes David, that's why completed student products are so important, not just worksheets and tests

DavidW: so, what made it possible, Jim, for that school in suburban Atlanta to "step out" of the mold?

DavidW doesn't know if "polite dialog" tends to fit into 45 minute periods

JimLerman: Bonnie, you raised a good point. Bubbleshare is cool because you can do online something that you could only do with software up until about 6 months ago. Now everyone can do whatever they want. What kind of issue does that raise for kids and schools?

JimLerman: good point David

BonnieHa: If content is appropriate

JimLerman: Bonnie, if appropriateness is an issue, digital stories can be done with iMovie or windows movie maker, which come as software on all pc's and macs.

JimLerman: free

BonnieHa: true

JimLerman: David, I heard the school's principal speak at Alan November's conference and watched the video of his presentation at NECC. seems to me that a lot of the reason why the school has been able to do so much is due to his vision and the fact that they're in a rather wealthy suburb where the parents and school board are supportive of this kind of activity.

DavidW: yes

JimLerman: ok we've got 10 minutes to go, can everyone visit a different website and comment please?

JimLerman: ok?

EmilieGst1: ok

BonnieHa: I'll try.

DavidW: . o O (although I think there are wealthy suburbs with principals without vision who don't find ways to engage students)

JimLerman: I'll be back in a minute

EmilieGst1: anyone doing "teaching social skills in the language arts community"?

JimLerman: right David, but I think these were contributing factors in this situation

DavidW: go for it

DavidW: Absolutely

DavidW: resources are still important

BJB2: I looked at social skills a little bit, Emilie

JimLerman: Bonnie, where are u?

BonnieHa: I'm taking a peek at social skills as well.

JimLerman: cool

BJB2: I liked the Tolerance lesson, but the whole site is pretty overwhelming!

JimLerman: what do you mean by overwhelming

BJB2: so many skills

EmilieGst1: there's a lot of info there, for sure

JimLerman: too much material? too heavy? too sophisticated?

BonnieHa: I agree, BJ.

BJB2: it's more like a cross curricular lesson...has to be supported by all the teachers

JimLerman: good point bj

JimLerman: making school more relevant and more rigorous is something to be done together, not by one teacher at a time

JimLerman: anyone agree or disagree with that?

BJB2 agrees

BonnieHa: I agree. All must be on board.

BJB2: that collaboration is sooo important....and is often lost when a child gets to high school

BJB2 looks at the clock on the wall

DavidW believes middle school, by its nature, is a more collaborative place than high school

BonnieHa: Thanks, Jim for all the resources.

EmilieGst1: yes, thank you

BJB2: before we conclude this discussion, Jim is hoping to make this a monthly discussion...

JimLerman: the need for professional collaboration (relationships) is so important and that's why the new 3r's are better

JimLerman: thank you all, I had a great time and I hope you got as much out of this as I did

BJB2: the next Three Rs is scheduled for September 26

BonnieHa: Thanks again. Good night, everyone.

JimLerman: please come back and bring a colleague

DavidW cheers enthusiastically for Jim's first Tapped In discussion

BJB2: would you be interested in having Jim create a group room for middle school teachers?

JimLerman: any feedback please?

BonnieHa: A group room is a great idea.

BJB2 smiles. Thanks, Bonnie.

BJB2: good discussion, Jim...let's get together next week and work on the group, OK?

JimLerman: ok

DavidW: not at all hard to create the group room, Jim

JimLerman: thank you David

DavidW: You're welcome

DavidW: Anyone in northern New Jersey picking up on the 3 "R's" as you have suggested?

DavidW: Senator Clinton even mentioned the similarity of classrooms today and 100 years again on Sunday at the debate

JimLerman: I think there are some pockets, there are some really great educators

DavidW smiles

DavidW: That's good to hear

JimLerman: don't you think so

DavidW: Oh, yes - I agree - there are great educators...it's the structure of many schools (and adherence to that structure) that seems to get in the way

JimLerman: that was part of the point I was trying to make in the beginning...did it get across?

DavidW wants to see schools as community-centers - open 24 hours a day

DavidW: Yes, I think so

JimLerman: good

DavidW: Thanks for leading this discussion tonight

DavidW: Take care - thanks again

BJB2 waves bye and heads to reception

JimLerman: it was very nice of you to come and participate, thank you very much,
David

JimLerman: by bj

DavidW: My pleasure - good topics to think about