Picking Up Where We Left Off?

Like many of you, I embraced the shift back to some sense of normalcy during this year. Even though the virus was present, the loosening of restrictions, return to in-person learning, and decline of zoom usage was welcomed by all. Seeing the expressions on my students faces and observing them interacting with materials and each other was great to see. Despite this, something was still missing, and I found myself questioning what needs to be done so that we can pick up where we left off, especially relating to student effort, motivation, accountability, and excitement for the learning process. Of course, this decline in engagement is understandable, for what else could result from two years of educational confinement and compartmentalization.

For the most part, we did what we could do to keep things moving, and while many found success with independent projects, most of us had to settle for what worked for all, with limited resources and opportunities. It was difficult to take attendance, tough to assign and evaluate work, and a challenge to keep students involved and interested. After all, there is only so much screen time or mask wearing one person can stand. Over time, it starts to become natural, and with negative consequences.

Perhaps these symptoms were already inching their way into the overall educational landscape? I’d like to blame it all on the pandemic, but I know that isn’t true. Our student and teacher population is, and has been, changing. Whatever the case or cause may be, the reality is that we have found ourselves in this evolving process. If the students come prepared to interact with classroom texts are truly welcoming.

The Importance of Service-Identification Alignment offers suggestions for how we might make the best identification choices in our programs. How to Start Blogging with Gifted Students, by Bryan Kirby and Jessica Stargardter, discusses the benefits of having students communicate their understandings through blogs. DJ Graham and Mila Rosa Carden demonstrate how to maximize student creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills by using a familiar curriculum model in Unlocking Integrated Curriculum for High School Gifted Learners. Jennifer Hoffman’s Virtual Real-World Research Projects to Engage Advanced Learners reminds us that if we want students to be active observers and consumers of resources and understand what it takes to be a researcher, we need to dive right into inquiry-based learning. Making Curriculum Matter stresses the importance of thinking about thinking and the intentional nature of its presentation throughout the curriculum. Special Populations asks us to consider that as we continue to provide safe and nurturing environments for our students, we must also invest in culturally responsive trauma-informed practices, prioritizing support for mental health. The Digital Ecosystem tackles the ever-growing problem of teaching what some consider to be “controversial issues” and recommends resources for navigating this touchy subject. iMathination presents Part 2 of mathematical modeling and looks at its role in mathematical creativity. Sparks of Innovation shows how to use fairy tales as a vehicle to teach science, creative writing, and history. Voices from the Trenches closes the issue by asking us to consider if the presence and representation of African Americans in our classroom texts are truly welcoming.

It is time to pick up where we left off, even if the landscape looks and feels a bit different. Education is, after all, a continually evolving process. If the students come prepared to interact with the material, their fellow students, and an educator prepared to provide resources and opportunities for them, I’m confident that we can. Let’s move forward.