

Is self-expression overrated? Too often in this world, I believe that the importance of self-expression is being overlooked and underplayed by those involved. It seems that as educators, we are taught to operate under a cloak of secrecy. We are not allowed to share with our students, that there is a personal side to us. Unfortunately the history of academia has caused our students to think under this same ideology. They are lead to believe that a teacher's life exists just within an academic setting. That we don't get out like normal people to do normal activities, like shopping and spending quality time with our loved ones.

Through the power that we have in our classroom, are we the root of this problem? Do we not allow enough self expression or free thoughts in our class? If we do allow more self expression, are we facing anarchy of sorts?

This idea of allowing the teachers to express themselves on a daily basis has been great for me. Within the community that has been created, there is no fear that what you say will be criticized or held against you. The contrary is actually true. Your thoughts and ideas are read, contemplated, and then commented on. This allows for free exchange of thoughts and ideas.

This open exchange of ideas has prompted me to think of the applications within my own classroom. One of my many journal entries was on the comparison of Cubical Life To Differentiated Learners. Here is a short excerpt of it:

- ✓ As I sit and think about this epiphany that I just had, I realize that cubical life has to be a lot like having a learning difference. Kids with learning differences have these barriers that surround them. These barriers may be anything from language to ADD. Within those barriers that surround them, they have a small break that gives them an outlet, or a little bit of hope. The longer that we leave those kids within the confines of their learning differences, they could feel that there space is closing in around them. That little opening that they counted on for hope, or for an outlet, suddenly starts to close also. These students probably start to feel stifled by their own environment. They may feel at that point, that no one understands what they are going through. These walls that surround them, are only so high, and can be overcome. So just like rats bailing from the ship as the water comes rushing in, these kids look to find a way out. They may choose to bail over the walls of the preverbal cubical. This is the point at which they may start to act up, and become discipline problems. This is where the system starts to label those kids as problem children. Others kids, when presented with the same situation, may just give up, and just sit and allow the walls to close around them. This approach unfortunately leaves them to there own fading hopes and fleeing thoughts.

I believe that within the proper controlled environment, that blogging could be a very beneficial addition. It could potentially help the kids who have learning differences. With the ability to post thoughts and feelings in a safe environment, they may soon touch upon the cord of another student, who is feeling the exact same way. I also believe that blogging could help reach out to the students that don't know how to help themselves. I know that we have all had those students in our class, that if you didn't look directly at them, you would never know that they were there. These are the students that we have to worry about. The students that are trapped, and don't know what to do, or are afraid to ask for help.

Is this generation of kids any different from us, when we were kids? Do they have more or less to worry about? Do they have more or less distractions than we did as kids? Has the evolution of technology, made their life easier?

- ✓ We are in the midst of the I Pod generation. This is a generation of kids, who only concern themselves with what will immediately satisfy their shortening attention spans. This is a generation where authority means nothing, and the response is no longer an obedient one, but a one of why or a one of all things being unfair. This is a generation of kids that have the world at their finger tips. They no longer need to pick up the phone to chat with someone at night, they can just log on to their instant messenger. With this improvement of the information area, some of our staples of the past may fade as quickly as the dinosaurs did. This generation of kids, no longer need to visit the library to do research, they can just surf the net to find what they are looking for. This reliance on technology has started to create a gap in their reading and writing skills. These skills are slowly being replaced by spell check and their own resistance to looking at something that doesn't have an electrical plug to it. It is hard for this generation to string a short amount of thoughts together, without wanting to use shortened words, such as ppl or b/c, because it would require extra effort to write out the whole word.

After my summer experience, I believe that blogging, could help us to address a very serious problem that we are facing in the academic world. We know that we are facing a world where kids are becoming more reliant on technology. The art of spelling and writing papers has been reduced to the simplest form of spell and grammar check. We need to use technology to our advantage, and not let it handicap our kids for the future. Within the controlled environment, blogging could allow for the creating of a virtual rough draft. This could allow the kids to share parts of their papers with their peers. In return they could receive immediate feedback, on possible changes that need to be made. This could help boost confidence in their writing and language skills.

Blogging is fast becoming a universal language among people of many walks of life. If we somehow try to turn our back upon it, I think that it could and will be used for destructive means, instead of constructive means. We need to keep up and help to guide our kids on the latest technology. Leading through example, we can show them that we are concerned on how and in what form they express and represent themselves, to us and the cyber communities of which they are active parts of.

### *Classroom Applications*

#### 1. Weekly reflection:

- ✓ This would start out as simply filling out a form on my webpage every week. Once they hit the submit button, their response would be sent to my school email address. Protecting the anonymity of the student, I would share some of those thoughts with the class. From there, I would hope to establish a sense of

community among the kids. Eventually, I could pilot an online blogging community for the kids to participate in.

2. Online homework help:

- ✓ I have heard stories of where teachers, have made themselves available on-line to the students at set times throughout the evening. I am hoping to try a program like this with my kids. A set time, to where if they get stumped, they could email, to get additional help with the homework or projects.

3. Online news letter:

- ✓ Last year, the computer teacher and myself, turned our schools yearbook process, into an online process. We did away with the need to cut and paste pictures into place. What I am hoping to start with the kids is an online monthly newsletter. Giving them a chance to report about the school and interview people.