Beyond Cut-and Paste

- *Engaging Students in Making Good New Ideas.*

- by Jamie McKenzie, EdD

- 2009 - FNO Press: Bellingham, Washington.

- Available from fnopress.com - $20.00

- Book Review by Douglas W. Green, EdD

- dgreen@stny.rr.com

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Introduction

- Jamie McKenzie is the editor of three online journals, *The Question Mark* (questioning.org), *From Now ON - The Educational Technology Journal* (no.org), and *No Child Left* (nochildleft.com).

- He has been a teacher, principal and superintendent and now writes, speaks, and consults. A focus is the damage he sees done to schools and students by the ill-considered, untested, punitive measures that are part and parcel of NCLB. He argues against fast food education and factory approaches to school improvement, suggesting instead that students be shown how to think, solve problems and invent good new ideas.

- Rather than summarize this book, I have provided a glimpse of a portion of the book's contents. My goal is to get you thinking and to encourage you to get this book in your hands. It is a valuable tool for self development and for anyone who does staff development. It would also be a good text for technology and leadership courses. I plan to use it in this manner for the next post-master's course I teach.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Good Ideas Matter

- Today's search engines that find information in fractions of a second give students a false sense of security. McKenzie says that we need to fight cut-and-paste thinking by adopting a school-wide policy outlawing the assignment of topical research projects. Such projects result in the production of a rehash of other people's ideas and thinking.

- Bad example: Go find out about Captain James Cook, Captain Matthew Flinders, Captain George Vancouver, and Captain William Bligh.

- Good example: Which of the following captains was the best at navigation? (Captain James Cook, Captain Matthew Flinders, Captain George Vancouver, and Captain William Bligh) This question requires the collection and weighing of evidence to substantiate a well-considered judgment. Such a comparison challenges the student at the top of *Bloom's Taxonomy* on the skill of evaluation. This type of research equips students to wrestle with real issues.

Making the Most of Social Networking

- Social networking is not new. If it is to have any value in education, teachers need to scaffold, skill build, and mentor. There is nothing automatically worthwhile about exchanging messages online. Gossip and blather are senseless online or offline. Cooperative learning can lead to "group think" where the majority squashes unusual or creative thought. For more on this concept see my summary of *Innovation Killers* at http://www.drdouggreen.com/wp-content/Innovation-Killer.pdf.

- In order to prepare students for effective synthesis or collaborative work, teachers need to be prepared and McKenzie says this rarely happens. Skilled moderators or facilitators are also usually necessary. Without one, groups can easily lapse into bull sessions or rambling exchanges. Before hopping on the social networking bandwagon, schools should focus on questioning, inventing, collaborating, and powerful writing in face-to-face situations with close attention to scaffolding and skill building. Simply adding distance and digital may be seductive but diversionary.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Embracing Complexity

- We live in times awash in simplicity and simple-minded thinking. But life is not simple. Schools must engage students in research and learning requiring them to construct answers and make up their own minds. Teachers must help the young embrace complexity while finding their way toward understanding. While schools may not have devoted much attention to synthesis in the past, it has become the crux of our challenge as educators in this century.

- Jamie recommends that teachers add the processes of wondering, pondering, wandering, and considering to simply digging for information. He provides many examples of questions you can pose to students in place of the just scooping information and smushing it together. We also need to allow students to wander back and forth between primary and secondary sources as some secondary sources leave out unfaltering details. The metaphor of an information field trip provides a good way to think of such wandering.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Media Literacy

- McKenzie makes a case that modern news stories are more likely to be sensational and entertaining rather than illuminating. This results in narrowing darkening, and distorting our view of the world. Far too much attention in schools is devoted to the gathering of information without showing students how to assess the reliability of sources. If we expect them to be media savvy, we must identify a repertoire of critical thinking skills and nurture them. He gives examples of things students might explore as they critique behind the headlines.

- Here are a few. Who are the authors and what do we know about their credentials? Is the information trustworthy? What techniques, if any, were used to push a point of view? How could this article be improved? How does this compare to other articles on the subject in terms of credibility? Many Web sites are listed that can help foster the teaching of media literacy.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Professional Development Issues

- Original thinking and synthesis have not received much attention during the formal training of most teachers. While original thinking, creativity, and synthesis are often major goals, there has not been enough teacher development to make it happen. McKenzie suggests that most teachers will need five to ten days over a period of years and warns that assessments must be aligned with the program. He offers a number of suggestions for how to deal with adult learning including collaboration and teachers making their own learning plans. Teaching students to produce original ideas is a worthwhile goal, but there is little chance it will endure unless a school digs in and devotes 4-5 years to the learning journey.

- A discussion of professional development precedes six ways that teachers can put students in situations where they have to build a case to defend a position or a proposal. There is also an explanation of the dozen literacies including text and numerical literacy that offer students opportunities to analyze, interpret, and understand information within a particular category of information or within a particular medium. Districts ready to roll with serious staff development would do well to contact Jamie McKenzie for assistance and consider purchasing copies for each teacher, administrator, and board of education member.

Wednesday, May 12, 2010