

The Three R's: Remembering, Reflecting, and Recapturing the Reason

By Dawn A. Moore, Education Specialist, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Warren Hills Regional School District

Why do teachers keep coming back to the opening days of school? What are they hoping to hear before the students return the next day or the following week? There is a great deal to talk about in education: Common Core State Standards, PARCC, the teacher evaluation system, Student Growth Objectives (SGO), Median Student Growth Percentiles (mSGP), multiple measures, tiered groups, scoring plans, Personal Needs Profiles (PNP), Achieve NJ, assessments, rating scales, performance tools, NJSMART, and the latest policies regarding HIB and school law. These are all part of the educational landscape and are to be addressed as we prepare students to be college and career ready. However, if this consumes us, then we have forgotten about the main reason we chose education as our profession.

As the district's Director of Curriculum and Instruction, I was asked to speak to the faculty during the opening week of school to inform them about the latest changes to the SGO process and to present a refresher on the elements of the teacher evaluation system. "I can do that," I affirmed, but my mind began to drift to "beyond compliance" and to remember that "inspiration"—breathing life into—moves us "beyond compliance."

At this point, I remembered a retired colleague from our district who wrote a poem entitled "Dream

Teaching." How appropriate! I found the title of my opening week's presentation: "Beyond Compliance to 'Dream Teaching.'"

Remembering—the First "R"

Standing before the faculty, I started speaking, "Go back to the beginning when you decided to pursue education. Were you a young child, a teenager, a young man or woman? Is this your second career? Why did you choose education? Do you remember what motivated you, what or who inspired you? Remember your first day. Remember your first year. Remember the following years." The audience stirred in their auditorium seats, and I asked them to share their remembrances with those around them, as I walked around to listen and to collect their responses. As for the reason, the overwhelming response echoed was the desire to inspire, to change, and to affect the lives of students.

Reflecting—the Second "R"

During the next segment, I asked the audience to reflect upon students who have inspired them, too. I shared the story of Marlana VanHoose, a teenager from Kentucky, blind since birth with cerebral palsy, who had been playing the piano by sight reading since age two. Next, projected onto the auditorium screen was Marlana singing The Star-Spangled Banner in acapella, at the beginning of a high school girls' basketball game for the

Kentucky State Championship. The screen audience and the live audience in front of me applauded in unison.

Marlana stated, "I like to give people hope and strength to live from singing and from encouraging people." How have students inspired us—instilled in us the motivation, enthusiasm, and courage to do better things and to achieve more? As we remembered and reflected, we sounded like Marlana and inspiration became a full circle. Our teaching backdrop of the remembrances and reflections includes the lives of students we affect and the lives of students who have affected us.

Recapturing—the Third "R"

Education can be hard at times, day after day, meeting challenges, and yet it provides opportunities, to engage students and to motivate them—sometimes in spite of themselves. So, I posed the question to the faculty: "What would students tell us as we begin the school year? What would they like us to remember, to reflect, and to recapture?" In 2008, fifth grader Dalton Sherman spoke before the Dallas Independent School District to over 20,000 district employees at a staff's back-to-school convocation. In a riveting speech, he asked them to believe in him, in his classmates, and in their colleagues, concluding his speech with "You're the ones who love us when it feels like no one else does." His words recaptured the essence of our own remembrances and reflections.



“Dream Teaching”

In his book *Dream Teaching*, poet, composer, playwright, and educator Edwin Romond describes first-hand what it is like to “dream” while teaching English in high school. How appropriate to share his words when we are talking about “beyond compliance!” One of the English teachers reads his poem aloud, as the audience gets it—laughing, reflecting, and then nodding as the poet describes what he sees of each of the students he has taught, “...thousands of them stretching

like dominoes into the night...” They ask him “to teach them.”

The Reason

What more could I possibly say to conclude the opening session? Yet, I wanted to speak about the transcendental quality of education, and so I did: “As we speak and write sentences, there is the space between our words, the pauses that allow our spoken and written words to make sense. This space is the ‘inspiration’—the breathing life into—the backdrop of our exchanges with students and

with each other. That’s what you do! Think about the ‘dominoes that stretch into the night of the sons and daughter almost mine,’ lined up, thanking you for teaching them, for inspiring them, for all the good things you have done for them and with them.

The 3 R’s—remember, reflect, recapture—and rekindle the spark of why we are here—love is the reason. Thank you for being that reason for it is what keeps me here!” There was nothing more to say.

References:

- Romond, Edwin. *Dream Teaching*. Grayson Books, www.edwinromond.com
 Sherman, Dalton. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZm0BfXYvFg>
 VanHoose, Marlana. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFY-2aOQwMI>

About the Author



Dawn A. Moore, Education Specialist, serves as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Warren Hills Regional School District in Warren County, New Jersey and has been an educator for 39 years. She has worked as an English teacher, a Reading Specialist, and a Librarian/Media Specialist at all grade levels, and has earned a Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, and Education Specialist Degree, along with her School Administrator and Principal standard certificates as part of the NJ EXCEL Program. Dawn loves all aspects of education and counts it among her greatest blessings—especially the people in it!