

Multi-Age Groupings



A NEW VISION FOR
GENERAL ENGLISH
AT COLONEL GRAY SENIOR
HIGH

Why are the general students disengaged?



- They feel a lack of power and respect.
- The curriculum is “dumbed-down” academic and they know it.
- They see little relevance to real life; “this stuff is useless” is a common complaint...and they’re often right.

Problems with the Status Quo:



Schools do not reflect the natural ways in which we learn and interact.

Real Life:



These are some of my best friends; none of us are the same age, so we would never have been in the same grade. We gravitate toward each other because we have similar interests and beliefs, not our age.



School:



In schools, students are grouped based on their age. We assume that because of birth date, they are all the same.

Real Life:



If our staff went to the ski hill to improve our skiing, we would be at different ability levels; we would all have different needs. We would never expect everyone to do the same thing at the same time.



School:



We expect students, who are all very different, to learn the same thing at the same time, regardless of their developmental level.

Reality Check?



Are we doing what's best for our
students?

Reality Check:



The current system was designed for the industrial age, and has not changed its basic format since Horace Mann developed it two centuries ago.

The Factory Model of Education:



Schools are factories and we set our students on an assembly line heading to post secondary institutions.



Problems with the Current System:



We are ruled by the calendar and thus students who need more time fail; those who need a challenge are bored.

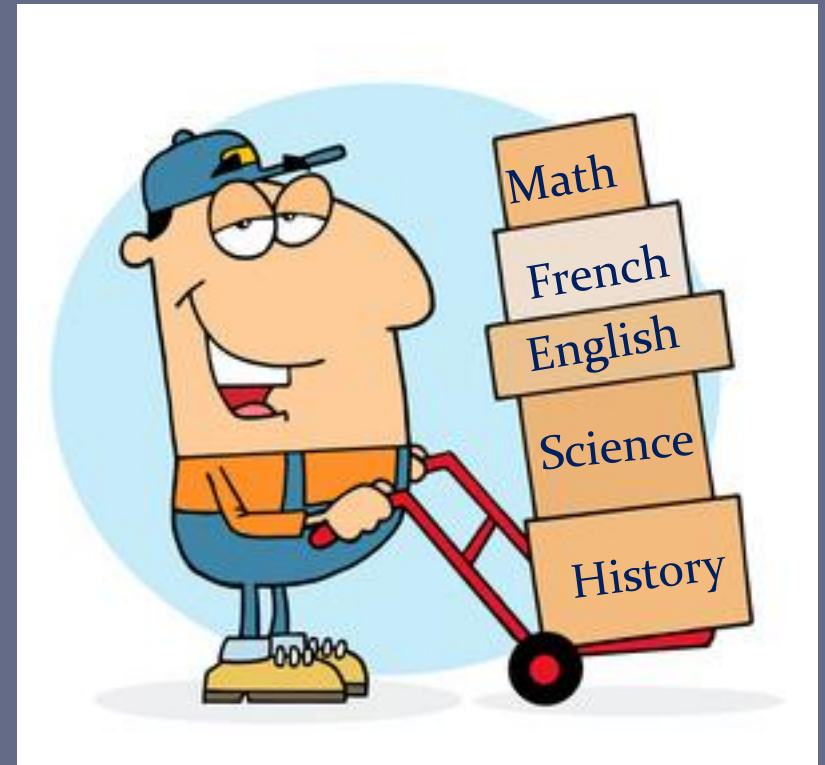
Problems with the Current System:



It is only working for those who
“fit the curriculum”.

Problems with the Current System:

Curriculum is taught in separate boxes, with little relevance to real life. Often, students do not transfer their knowledge.



The Result?



- Students who don't fit the norm can't keep up; school is a frustrating place.
- Too little success and too much failure

Why Do We Need to Change 531/631?



- The current system/general courses do not focus on how students learn best.
- Our current system works well for teachers and administrators, because it's easy to manage; however, it is not always learner centered.
- The result is disengagement and failure.

Is There a Solution?

We revamp the current general English classes and adopt a “multiage” approach.



We cannot impose a curriculum on a young mind; instead we must feed the mind with enabling skills that empower it to grow on its own
(Hartjen p. 110)

Multi-age Classrooms:



- A community of learners who have freedom and control over their learning.
- Curriculum is designed to offer a challenge, while meeting the developmental needs of each student.
- Students are treated with respect and are assessed in ways that will lead to their success.
- Students are given projects that have real life relevance.

A Quick Comparison:

Single age classrooms:

- Students grouped by age
- Teacher has students for one semester
- Students fit the curriculum

Multi-age classrooms:

- Age range varies by 2-3 years
- Teacher has students for more than one semester
- A variety of developmental levels
- Curriculum fits the student

How Can We Make it Work?



- High schools are structured around a semester system with subject specific courses that are geared toward preparing students for post secondary institutions.
- Because of large populations, scheduling difficulties, and the need for subject area specialists, it would be hard to mirror the multiage situations possible in primary schools
- However...there are several components of multiage pedagogy that will work well in high school.

Proposal:



Combine English 531 and 631 (with the hope that 431 will eventually be added), and call it “Senior English”.

Proposal:



- Students will be assessed on a continuum.
- They will work toward the outcomes of the courses at their own rate.
- They will complete projects/achieve outcomes when they are ready, not when calendar says they must.

Proposal:



- Students who aren't quite ready for the academic stream could be placed in this class as well; when they are ready for academic work, they can start to do it.
- Course code should be flexible, so the teacher could award a 521 credit if the student has achieved the necessary outcomes of that course. We could even make it an open course and call it English 801.

Some Scenarios:

Student One

Sept '11-Jan '12 (first semester):
completes 2/3 of the 531 outcomes

Feb '12-June '12:
completes all 531 outcomes and 1/2
of the 631 outcomes

Sept '12 -Dec '12:
completes all 631 outcomes and is
done of the course.

Student Two

Sept '11-Jan '12 (first semester):
Completes all 531 outcomes and 1/3
of the 631 outcomes

Feb '12-May '12:
Completes all 631 outcomes and is
finished early. Can work on
other coursework, assist class
mates or have a free class.

The Differences:

Current Courses:

- Primary focus is on curriculum
- All students work on same skills
- If students “fail” they must take the course again.
- Teacher-directed learning
- High failure/dropout rate

Proposed Course:

- Primary focus is on the learner
- Students work on skills according to developmental readiness
- Students are assessed on continuous growth and pick up where they left off
- More chances to feel success!

The Teachers



- Teachers of this course should be those who *want* to work with general students, not ones who are “forced” to because of scheduling. The relationship between teachers and students is key to the success of the program.
- Two teachers would work as a team, allowing for a great deal of flexibility to their role as facilitators.

The Instruction:



- Thematic lessons with real life application
- Clear expectations
- Differentiated instruction
- Flexible, varied and challenging activities
- Provides for lots of freedom and choice
- Emphasizes self-initiated, project-based learning

The Instruction:



Thematic units will be planned on a two-three year rotation to allow for multiple grade levels. For example:

The Instruction:



- **CONTENT:** Teachers will ensure that instruction/lessons are in line with provincial outcomes.
- **PROCESS:** Students will be engaged in meaningful activities and projects designed to help them master skills and meet outcomes. Length of time spent on an assignment will vary with each student.
- **PRODUCTS:** Projects and assignments that allow the students to demonstrate their learning.

The Instruction:

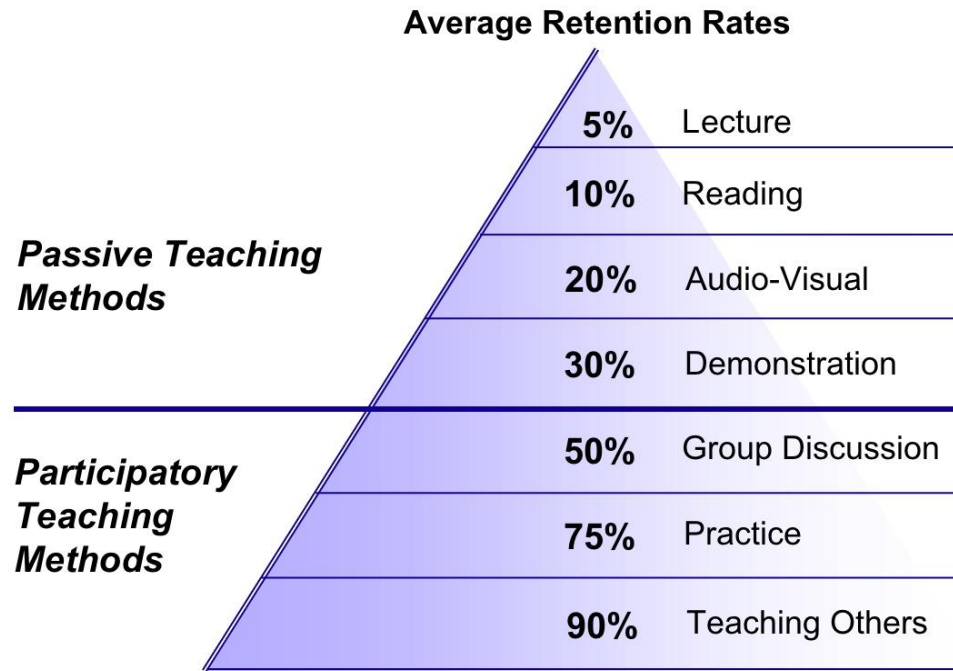


- Reading materials will vary to address student needs
- Texts will be available on tape for those who need it.
- Ideas will be presented in various ways to address visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners.
- Teachers will address large groups, small groups and individuals to teach and/or reinforce concepts.
- Additional challenges will be offered to those who need it.
- Students will be used as peer helpers and mentors.

The Instruction:



The Learning Pyramid*



*Adapted from National Training Laboratories. Bethel, Maine

The Environment:



- Flexible groupings of desks
- Learning stations
- Diverse reading materials
- Break out rooms for group work or small group instruction
- *Dragon, Naturally Speaking* will be used for students who struggle to write
- Focused on the individual
- Students helping each other

A Typical Class:



9-9:15

Reading Time – *reading for pleasure*

- one teacher does read aloud to struggling readers.
- other students go to room #2 to read on their own
- journal responses will be used from time to time

9:15 – 9:30

Whole Group Instruction – thematic lesson when necessary

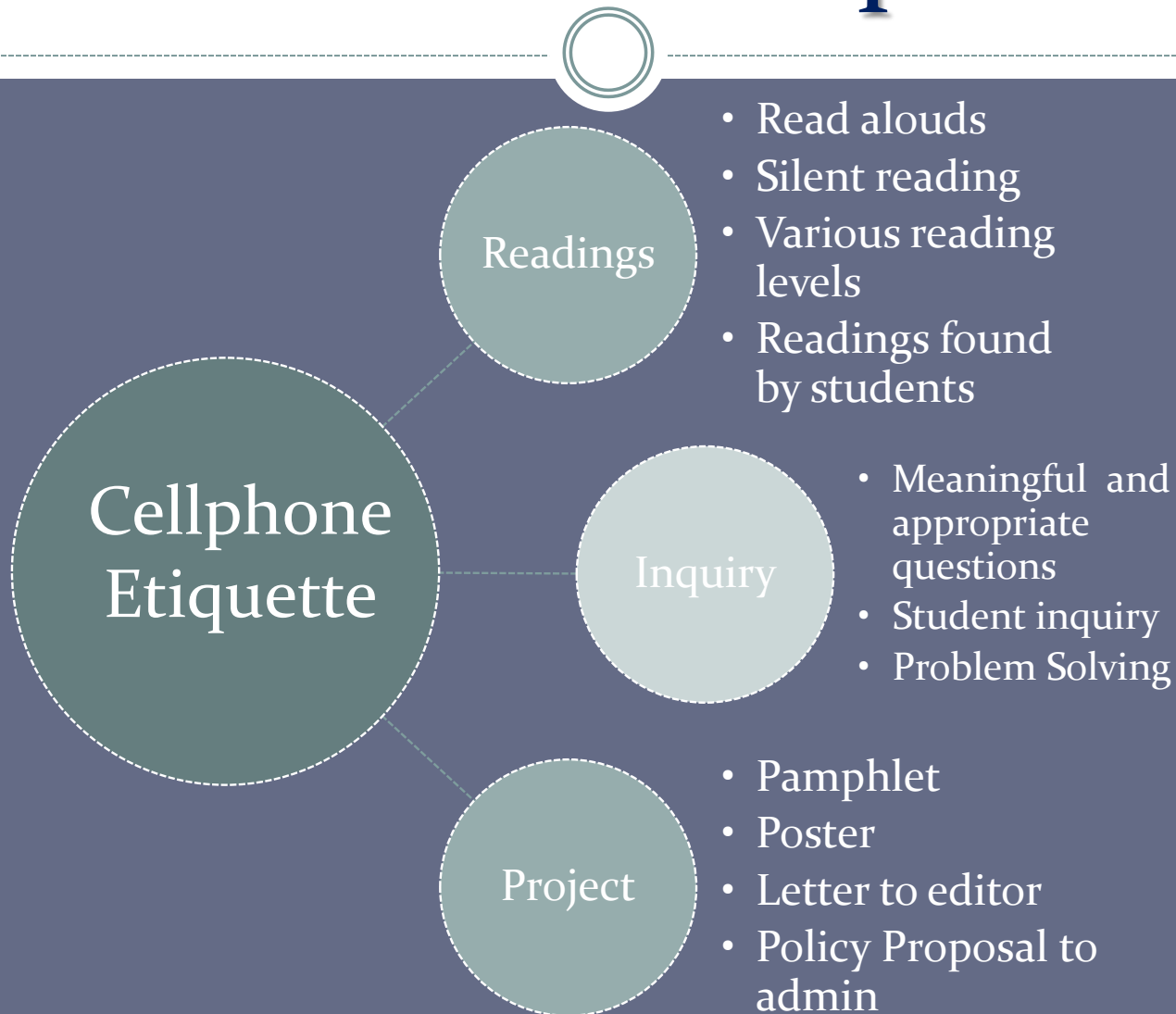
9:30 – 10:15

Individual and/or Group Work Options

- different readings and assignments based on level
- small group discussions/assignments
- project work
- writer's workshop
- teachers will facilitate groups , assist students who need extra help, or provide more challenge for those who need it.

**Times will vary to adapt to the current lesson and/or needs of the students*

Real-World Topics:



Sample Thematic Unit:



Education: *Students will be asked to investigate and evaluate the education system on PEI.*

- Unit will begin with small groups discussing and presenting what they think works well and what needs to be improved.
- Students will read a variety of texts on the subject and will choose from ones appropriate for their reading level. They will also be required to do some research and find information on their own.
- They will participate in small and large group discussions on the topic.

Sample Thematic Unit:



- Students will be asked to reflect in their journals on some of the readings and discussions.
- Students will view *Dead Poet's Society* and *The War on Kids*. They will discuss what the movie/documentary are suggesting about education. They will compare and contrast it to their own experiences.
- They will also view some videos from youtube.com—Sir Ken Robinson, Dan Brown, etc.

Sample Thematic Unit:



- Students will do some research into systems of education other than their own as well as other literacy issues.
- They will interview students from outside the class, as well as teachers and parents to get their views/ideas on the education system.
- Students will conduct surveys of their peers.

Sample Thematic Unit:



Writing Assignment Choices: Letter to the principal or student council suggesting an improvement for the school, a letter to the editor on an educational issue, an explanation of a policy, a suggested activity, etc.

Project Ideas: Theme for projects: *engaging the disengaged*.

Students will design their ideal school. They will cover instruction, curriculum, structure (physical and time), extra-curricular activities, etc. The project will be presented to the administration team.

Students will design a extra-curricular activity designed to create more participation from those who are disengaged from school life. They will present to student council executive.

Students will design their ideal course and present it to administration.

Differentiated Instruction:



Writing assignments will be adjusted based on literacy level.
For example:

Expectations for journal reflections –some will be struggling to write a few sentences while others will be expected to write a well-developed paragraph. Teachers will work to improve the students writing skills as they move through the course.

Struggling writers can use *Dragon, Naturally Speaking* for some assignments.

Differentiated Instruction:



Students working on 531 outcomes will work on expository writing assignments, while the focus for 631 students will be persuasion.

Therefore, 531 students may write an explanation of our exemption policy but 631 students will be writing a letter to the school board persuading them to keep the controversial policy.

Differentiated Instruction:



Projects:

- Student's individual skills and talents will be respected and used to best advantage.
- Expectations will be based on where the student is on the learning continuum.

Assessment:



- Student reflection and goal setting
- Portfolios that show the student's progress
- Frequent documentation by teachers
- Narrative reporting

Assessment:



Portfolios will include:

- initial goals and subsequent reflections
- weekly progress reports
- journal entries
- informal and formal writing assignments
- creative assignments
- projects

Giving students regular opportunity to reflect on their learning becomes a powerful and integral part of their education. It contributes to self motivation, gives them a clearer understanding of concepts and direction for setting goals.

~Marion Leier

To Conclude: Why Do We Need to Change?



Our current general English classes work for some, but not all of our students. The proposed changes will help to:

- Put the focus on the students as learners and take it off the calendar.
- Allow for flexibility for those who need it.
- Create more opportunities for success!

Let's take a leap of faith; let's start a journey down a new road that may take our students -- and us -- to a more student-centered destination.

Imagine what could happen...



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