

Educational Empowerment Newsletter

Volume 1, No. 6

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.
--Anais Nin

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Best Practice of Literacy Instruction Workshop Summer 2005

“I was able to put it all together” one participant in the weeklong 2005 literacy learning conference reported. “Before I got all the pieces (reading aloud, guided reading, shared reading, writer’s workshop, phonics), but didn’t know how they relate. Now I do.” The Best Practice in literacy Instruction workshop was held at Visions Unlimited Academy this summer and was well received by experienced and less experienced teachers alike.

The workshop was presented by Gretchen Tazea, Cindy Damron, Mary Sue Houser, Cheri Beck and Marney Donald and led by Yvonne Shay. The workshop is highly interactive and as the comment above suggests stretched the participants to deeper understanding of the concepts that support reading and writing instruction.



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We wanted to help the participants apply these learning structures,” reported Yvonne Shay, “ and to see the beauty of student achievement that is a result”. This instruction is based on the needs of students, and the research into how the brain works and how we all learn. The research isn’t new, it is just underused.

Participants learned to apply scientific research in a way that positively impacts learning using a natural learning environment and a knowledge of how the human brain performs.

This workshop is an annual event for EE, LLC and each year incorporates the new learning about teaching and presentation that we acquire during the course of our work. Participants found the workshop offered professional support, camaraderie, confidence building and deeper understanding of teaching and learning.

Here are some comments from participants...

“The workshop was helpful in that the methods of instruction were very clear and made more clear by the questions posed. Readers and Writers Workshop will be used in my classes.”

Ms. B.M.

“I have learned a lot this week coming to the school. When I went to classes that were doing Writers Workshop this stuff was like a foreign language. Now I have all the information so when I do inclusion in the regular education classes I will have a better idea what to work with the students.”

Ms. C.P.

“This workshop gave me all the pieces of a literacy classroom. It affirmed some things in my teaching, but also gave me ideas and experiences to take back to my room.”

Ms. M.H.

“One of the problems across the USA is illiteracy. This program really puts the problem in perspective. It gives teachers an excellent tool for raising the illiteracy rate. It was worth the 1,900 mile trip!”

Anonymous

“Well organized, good information – I like all the information in the notebook. I can use a lot of this information to teach children about books and the library. I believe this type of learning will help instill a love of reading and writing for the children.”

Ms. L.K.

“Having a weeklong workshop including all of the parts of Best Practices of Literacy in one allows a teacher to see the whole process. I had the parts... now I was introduced to the whole... and I get it!”

Ms. J.C.



About EE, Today

An Interview with Richard Valentine

By Mary Sue Houser

Mary Sue Houser met with Richard Valentine, partner in EE, LLC this month to discuss the goals and direction of the professional development group and the accomplishments of the last year.

Mary Sue: Richard, how long has the “company” been working together and how do you feel about the progress we have made?

Richard: Yvonne Shay and I decided to form the company in 1996, so that is nine years and I am happy to say we still have some of the same clients we started with. Our goal was to support them in ways they would be successful in their jobs. And we have.

Mary Sue: How do you know?

Richard: Data, student achievement data in Whittier (elementary in Phoenix) and at Martin (elementary in Deming, NM) show what a strong leadership and professional development partnership over time can do in terms of student achievement. Both schools started out with very low scores in reading and now exceed state averages. This doesn't happen by accident. It takes strong leadership and consistent teacher training. The principals of these schools Ronnie Petrie and Javier Milo are to be congratulated for vision and persistence. I met briefly with Javier this week, his district as reward him with a brand new school and he received the Milken Educator of the year award last year.

Mary Sue: Another EE client received that award also, isn't that right?

Richard: Sure, Dr. Judy Tanner of Magdalena Schools received the award a couple years before Mr. Milo. It was a thrill for her and for us.

Mary Sue: About EE accomplishments this year?

Richard: Yes we are proud of several accomplishments, but remember we don't do the real work; the real credit goes to the client and the people we support.

Mary Sue: Such as?

Richard: Such as Javier Milo, Ronnie Petrie, as we talked about before and the Alamogordo Leadership, Criss Johnson. We are very proud of the work the Alamo teachers are doing, and the literacy leaders there, too. We are also appreciative of the team. Yvonne works hard to move everyone toward high quality, consistency and flexibility. The team there—Karin Williams, Cheri Beck, Shelly Rice, Darlene Chilton, Carmen Call, Cindy Damron – have worked hard to be there for the teachers in terms of relevant workshops, coaching and demonstration lessons. Yvonne and I are very proud of them and the work they are doing. We have other projects such as in Magdalena, Del Rio, Lordsburg where this same quality and teamwork is supporting local leadership.

Mary Sue: You said “several”?

Richard: Yes, Visions Unlimited Academy, our charter school has grown in stability, quality and professionalism. Yvonne Shay is Executive Director. After a lot of hard work by the teachers there --- Gretchen Taeza, Marney Donald, Cindy Damron, Pam Buchanan and Missi Hayes, and Alison Opitz, our business manager, we can point to academic progress and a maturation of the organization.

Mary Sue: How do you and Yvonne see Educational Empowerment in the future?

Richard: We see our colleagues and ourselves as leaders in thought and practice in literacy learning and organizational behavior throughout the country. We have great content, a thriving consulting practice, and a school where we learn and practice this stuff. It is ideal.

Mary Sue: How will you achieve this vision?

Richard: First of all, we can't underestimate the capacity Yvonne has for leadership, new ideas, teamwork and her ability to communicate a vision of quality. If we are open to new ideas and follow through with the skills and collaborative skills she teaches, we are well on our way. The other chief asset we have is the power of being together, of growing toward a common goal and developing the organization to realize the vision.

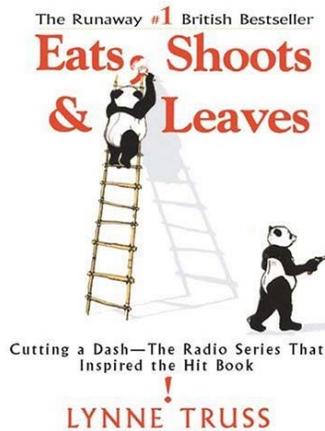
Many may be tempted to think they know what Yvonne and her team teaches based on what she taught five years ago... but they can rethink that. She expands her content and presentation skill as she and the world grows in knowledge and expertise. As far as growing and relating to her clients... she's as skilled as Ophra. And as determined.

Mary Sue: That's my experience, too.

Richard: So, to get where we want to be, we walk our talk, continue to learn and devise ways the organization can extend our walk to wherever our clients need us to be.

This interview with Richard Valentine took place August 5, 2005. More excerpts will be presented in the September issue of EE Today.

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Eats, Shoots and Leaves By Lynn Truss

Delightful is a term we associate with a Mid-Summer Dream or with the snow fairies in a Nutcracker performance ... certainly not punctuation. Until now. Eats, Shoots and Leaves is a book on punctuation, and is in fact, quite delightful. Eats, Shoots and Leaves renders us informed, amazed and appreciative of the most everyday of things--- the comma, apostrophe, the dash and such.

I was disappointed that the semi colon was not elevated to its true status as the emperor of all punctuation, but was thrilled with her examination of the dash and the comma. Eats, Shoots and Leaves thesis is, punctuation placement does matter. The title comes from a joke that illustrates this point. The panda bear walks into a bar, orders a sandwich... she eats it, draws a pistol, fires it and heads for the exit.... The bartender shouts “what are you doing?” to the panda. She hands him a book on Central China that reports Pandas live in that region and eats, shoots and leaves. “Look it up”, the panda shouts as she disappears. Apparently, doing what pandas do.

So, punctuation matters. Lynn Truss implores us to care, to use sharpie markers and correct Store Fronts and other advertisements that confuse plural and possessive. She advocates vigilante action to restore the dignity of the language through punctuation and to honor those freedom fighters that stand on the line in service of clarity and precision.

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I highly recommend this book for all writers, teachers of writing – especially at middle and high school levels. Kids that age would like parts of it too... Lynn Truss reminds us that clarity is no accident and that word choice and voice have a lot to do with how a line is punctuated. Consider the behavior of the Panda in the bar—as opposed to what might have happened had the book reported that the panda lives in central china eucalyptus groves where she eats shoots and leaves.

Calendar of Events

Theme for the Year – “Best Year of Our Lives” -Celebrate the “Willy’s Way”

EE Meetings 2005-2006

September 24, 2005 – Debrief Train the Trainer

October 29, 2005 – Messageboard / Class Update

November 19, 2005 – Sales and Marketing

January 28, 2006 – Summer

March 18, 2006 – Taxes

April 1, 2006 – Value of Reflection

May 13, 2006 – Accomplishments 2005-2006

January 7, 2006 – EE Retreat – Las Cruces, New Mexico

June 19-23, 2006 – Best Practices in Comprehensive Literacy

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