

## 7 OTHER HIGHLY EFFECTIVE HABITS, WITH A NOD TO STEPHEN COVEY

**W**e've created the following guidelines — with a nod to Stephen Covey — with the belief that our job is to facilitate learning experiences that create intellectual and emotional growth for educators and the students they teach. Whether we're talking about educational technology, differentiation, adolescent development, or popular culture, we want teachers to understand new information in useful and reflective ways.

### 1. Walk a mile in their shoes.

We respect our teachers' needs in any way that we can. We survey our teachers about their needs and spend time meeting participants in our first session. We differentiate their assignments and scaffold final projects limited only by their imagination. We make sure all work can be directly applied to their classroom.

### 2. Teach, think, and play.

Many workshop settings don't allow ample time for applying, discussing and playing with ideas. Ryan created a graduate class about popular culture in the classroom that is titled "Teach, Think, Play." The premise is that teachers need all three components to deliver the best learning possible. First, we need to study the ways educators teach in the classroom. To step beyond teaching, we want people to think and explore theoretical discourses around the course or professional development topic. Lastly, we require our teachers to play with their ideas to create their final projects. True learning experiences encompass all those pieces.

### 3. Make connections with everything.

Often, our role is to create opportunities for transference of knowledge and experience among people, disciplines, and activities. Once teachers start connecting the dots inside the classroom with outside experiences, learning becomes personal and powerful.

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When our teachers do readings or activities, we ask them to share personal connections they made with the text. One of Ryan's "final exams" is a tiered activity where teachers answer questions on sticky notes, cluster them around themes, and use markers to connect these ideas to their colleagues' responses, creating a massive mind map.

### 4. Make the work about learning, not grades.

When teachers in a graded workshop express anxiety about their grades, it becomes hard for them to focus on exploration of content. We stress that our goal for them is to learn; the grade will come, and we take responsibility for helping them achieve that goal. Our assignments are built around what teachers know and have learned, as opposed to quizzing them on facts.

### 5. Create structures to abandon structures.

Josh Waitzkin, the chess prodigy in the film *Searching for Bobby Fisher*, explains how one must "learn form in order to leave form." You plan out as much as you can imagine for your workshop, with clear goals, schedule, and varied instructional methods. A structure is most successful when it yields to the needs of the participants.

In one of Ryan's classes, the teachers decided an activity was going so well that they would continue through lunch. A learning community formed from a group that had known each other for five instructional days. If you need a quick confidential vote to change direction, use sticky notes.

### 6. Constantly get and give feedback and take time to process learning experiences in a variety of ways.

Successful companies are obsessed with using customer feedback to improve their product. To make sure we receive feedback, we create a variety of daily exit surveys. Teachers might write about a concept that has intrigued them, something about the instruction they'd like to change, an idea they want to develop with the class. Many activities will get at the pulse of your class while also communicating that you are there to learn, too. Use index cards and go over them the next day. Make the prompt worthwhile and thoughtful.

### 7. Embrace ex post facto curriculum design.

Sometimes what you were really teaching does not reveal itself until your original plan has been executed. After each event, we examine the feedback we've gathered. We're often surprised that the outcome of a session might not have been what we intended or planned, and that's OK. Unintended detours and outcomes are hallmarks of our richest learning experiences. ■



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