

Introduction

The difference between a goal and a dream is attitude. To the logical mind, a goal seems realistic. The term itself implies a predetermined point at which you know you've succeeded. A dream, on the other hand, relies on hunch and hope over logic; it is airier, but less bulky, than a goal. Its fulfillment depends more on vision and imagination than on planned, structured steps. More loosely defined than a goal, a dream tends to meander down uncharted paths. In fact, when a dream is reached, it may be a surprise even to the person who conceived it!

Our Goals and Our Dreams for Our Students

In our early years as educators, we often considered dreams and goals to be the same. Because of this, we did not always directly pursue our teaching goals (for fear that we would not succeed) and we tried to make our subjective dream of being good teachers too realistic. We thought, for example, that all our classroom lessons had to be as exciting and memorable as a Disney cartoon; when they weren't, we often saw ourselves as failures. By mixing up our goals for our students' learning with our dreams to be good teachers, we sidestepped many important lessons that would have benefited our students. These might not have been perfect lessons, but they would nonetheless have been good attempts.

It is only now, having taught long enough that many of our present students are the children of some of our earliest ones, that we have discovered the beauty in distinguishing our aims (goals) from our missions (dreams), in recognizing that

learning occurs not only in the mind but also in the heart. Good things – like a sense of perspective on success or failure – do take time.

“To teach a child to read” may be our aim, but “to help a child appreciate the beauty of written words” is our mission. “Getting to know your community” is a laudable goal for our students, but “envisioning the possible ways you can serve your community” is a lifelong dream we seek for them. “Using higher level thinking skills” will expand children's minds; “developing empathy and concern for others” will open their hearts.

Our collective years in education have taught us a very important lesson: The most relevant and lasting learning experiences involve the heart. We'd like to think that classrooms everywhere would operate on the principle of designing “lessons of life.” After all, long after our students have mastered the multiplication tables and memorized the capitals of the world, they will assume their roles as citizens. The most able mathematician, adroit political leader, articulate teacher, skilled surgeon, savvy business owner – each contributes more to society when applying technical and professional know-how from a foundation of self-confidence, compassion, respect for others, and stewardship.

As educators, we have both the opportunity and the obligation to prepare students fully to assume their roles as global citizens. How? By helping them to acquire academic skills and knowledge, certainly. Yet, equally important, by helping them appreciate themselves and care about others – and by providing concrete ways for them to act upon their caring.

Thus, this book, *Growing Good Kids*. Within its pages are many different examples of lessons

we have designed and taught to help us reach our dream, our mission: to allow all students to experience the joy of learning about themselves while acting in the service of others.

About the Activities

In designing these lessons, we have paid attention to many solid principles of learning espoused by respected educators. All of the activities contain these elements:

They involve both cognitive and affective learning. The activities call on students to think, feel, and react simultaneously. Based mostly in the content areas of language arts and social studies, these activities also contain aspects of innovation, introspection, or humor – elements that help to make content memorable. For example, “Grate Mistakes” (pages 16–24) provides the cognitive lesson that mistakes sometimes lead to important inventions; it also invites students to explore the affective concept that none of us is perfect. In “Filling Our Own Shoes” (pages 70–72), students learn cognitively about individuals who had strength and character in their lives and reflect affectively on friends and family who have helped them build their own character.

They are experiential. Each activity is based upon the belief that our students already know much about life and themselves and that they are always curious to learn more. Too often, it is assumed that adults do the teaching while kids do the learning. In these activities, our goal is to blur this teaching-learning division by making learning an active, cooperative endeavor.

They are open-ended. All activities can be interpreted and completed according to the individual ideas of the teacher and the students. No child should feel reluctant to complete the work out of fear that the final product might be “wrong” or unacceptable. In fact, students will express themselves most creatively and benefit most fully when you allow them to complete the activities without regard to the almighty grade.

They are product focused. Every activity allows students to concretely demonstrate their thinking and feeling. Each lesson has a clearly

defined beginning, middle, and end as well as a tangible product showing the results of students’ explorations. In some cases, the product might be a piece of introspective writing (as in “I Wanna Be Bugged by You,” pages 25–29); in others, it might be a community service project to help our global neighbors (as in “Links for Life,” pages 122–126). Your students’ conversations may suggest additional possibilities for products. “How can we share our learning?” is a question of great value for every activity.

They are teacher and student tested. We are not asking you to teach a lesson that we ourselves have not taught. Every activity has withstood the toughest test of all: a hands-on trial with students in “regular,” heterogeneously grouped classroom settings. The samples of student work that accompany many lessons are just a handful of the many original, wise, and multifaceted responses the activities have elicited from children. The samples are intended as models and, as such, are excellent springboards for your students’ creative endeavors. Share these examples with your students or use them for your own personal reference; the benefits of access to our students’ work might encourage your students to stretch their minds and their hearts.

They can be modified to suit teachers’ and students’ special needs. Although the activities are broadly designed for heterogeneously grouped classrooms of students in grades 3–8, teachers at the primary or high school levels should be able to adjust many of the activities with little trouble. Likewise, we recognize that every classroom has its own unique personality. We encourage you to mold and reshape the activities in consideration of and respect for your students’ needs, strengths, interests, and weaknesses (yes, even these!). Remember, no single book is appropriate for all students of any age. Pick and choose appropriately, for you know your students better than anyone.

They are flexible in scope and time. Each activity has been designed so that you can adapt it to your own and your students’ needs. You’ll find that some activities will work best within

individual classrooms. Others will be equally effective in a large team setting of multiple classrooms. Still others are appropriate for schoolwide participation.

Some lessons are intended for one class session, while others may extend for longer periods of time. In each instance, we'll tell you the most effective time frame we've found for conducting the lessons. Feel free to adapt this to your own particular situation. Read through the activity and determine what goals are important for your students, then match them within a workable time frame that fits your schedule as well as your instructional style. After all, learning involves taking risks and using information in different ways.

They can be holistically evaluated. In the process of "growing good kids," the issue of grading students' work also arises. The purpose of the activities, as designed and field tested, is to enhance self-awareness, expand leadership opportunities, and generate creativity and compassion. As such, the activities are not intended to be evaluated with an arbitrary letter or number grade. Doing so will give students too little direction in how to improve their work and may stifle their blossoming sense of self and awareness of others. A gentle reminder: These activi-

ties are meant to open student's minds and hearts. Be cautious – children are "growing."

How to Use the Activities

Each activity begins with a brief introduction followed by capsulized information about learning objectives, product, related curriculum areas, materials, time frame, and, if necessary, preparation guidelines. A few activities provide useful background information as well. Activity steps are clearly numbered. Most activities include "For Surefire Success" hints for making the activity fully effective. You will also find suggestions for adapting or expanding many activities for use with your own class, other classes, students' families, and the community.

With some activities, we suggest related books and other resources that may be of interest to you or your students. You will find descriptions, publishing information, and where-to-find-it facts about these optional materials in "Resources We Recommend" (pages 11–14).

While most of the activities include a writing component, feel free to substitute other means of communication (audio, video, drawing, skits, and so on) if you'd rather not assign a writing activity or if some of your students have difficulty writing.

Holistic Evaluation

What It Is


Comments that:

- give second chances to improve
- consider the paper or product as a whole
- offer constructive ideas for growth and improvement
- ask the student, "What did you learn?"

What It Isn't

Letter/number grades that:

- say, "One strike, you're out!"
- dissect individual segments
- provide little, if any, constructive feedback on strengths and weaknesses
- ask the student, "What did you earn?"

The sequence for using the activities is entirely up to you. Start by choosing those that spark your interest or that seem particularly fitting for your group of students. A few activities will work especially well at the beginning of the school year. The  symbol signals

these “get-acquainted” activities. You will also find these activities helpful when there have been changes in the makeup of your classroom and when people need to get “reacquainted” after holiday or term breaks.

Time frames reflect our experience using the activities. These will vary depending on the size of your class or group, the ages of your students, the time of day, and your own teaching style. You may find it helpful to plan your own time frame for each activity step.

We’d Love to Hear from You

Please let us know how the activities work for you. Did you modify them to fit your personal

style, talents, or school circumstances? If so, how? What changes can you suggest? We also invite you to send us some of your students’ responses to the activities. We’d love to correspond with you and your students about how you like the activities — and, yes, we *will* write back! Write to us in care of Free Spirit Publishing, 217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299.

Remember, we’re all in this thing called “education” together. Together we can surely broaden our students’ hearts and minds and, in doing so, fulfill our own goals and dreams! After all, what better beginning can we give our students for life than the gift of learning to “grow” their own hearts? Everyone’s future depends on our “growing good kids.” We hope this book becomes a valued resource in your classroom.

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