

Authentic Learning is Test Prep

Anxious. Frustrated. Worried. Uncertain.

These are all adjectives that describe the behaviors many students feel when faced with high stakes tests.

Teachers feel tremendous pressure to prepare students for high-stakes tests. In response, they spend considerable time before the test on test-like items and teaching test-taking strategies. At the same time, students feel tremendous pressure to perform on high-stakes assessments.

Let's consider this scenario.

Two individuals need to lose 50 pounds. At the end of six months, they both lost 50 pounds – hurray!

Wait a minute. Let's not celebrate too quickly.

One person lost 50 pounds by making lifestyle changes with food and exercise while the other one lost fifty pounds by throwing up her dinner every night.

Both of these individuals scored excellent on “The Test” but one of them accomplished the goal in a much more healthy way with life long influence.

Blend authentic learning and test prep.

Consider the following principles that have proven to positively influence reading achievement, as well as promote a life-long love of reading.

The Reading Principle: It only make sense that the more you practice doing something the better you get at it. Any athlete knows that you get better at your sport by practicing. The same idea applies to reading. If we want students to get better at reading, they need time to read a variety of authentic texts they can read and want to read. Skillful reading correlates with higher achievement on tests.

The Response Principle: Our students need time to respond to text through writing, talking and drawing/creating. When students talk about what they read, they learn from each other. They process texts together and build on each others ideas (synthesis). Writing helps students dig deeper into their thinking process. And, don't forget about artistic expression that represents

comprehension! Practicing how to comprehend through talking, writing and expression lends itself to more confidence on comprehension based high stakes tests.

The Explicit Teaching Principle: Explicit instruction in how to comprehend text is important. Teachers should make their thinking visible by modeling how to use a strategy and then give students time to practice. Many educators are such efficient readers and writers that their processes have become hidden in their heads. Teachers have to dig into their brains and show learners how to process as they read. When teachers show students how to think and understand what they are reading, students have a model from which to work. These models are anchors for any text, including test selections.

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