Reaching Reluctant Readers in a First-Year Writing Program
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Overview

- My Background (Academic and Educational)
- Challenge: The Reluctant Reader
- Cultivating Engaged Readers
  - The Happiness Advantage
  - The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian
  - Additional Assignments & Activities

I'll be sharing the following with you today.
I earned my AA at WCC in 1979, my BA and MA at UHM in 2005 and 2007, and my MFA at National University in 2016. Throughout my college adventures I’ve been a non-traditional student. The majority of students I teach at WCC are also non-traditional, so I draw from my experiences as a student at all levels.
Over the years I’ve taught the following classes—all of which require students to read and write and think.
My colleagues and I have discovered that students often don’t read the material assigned, and many colleagues have resorted to preparing PowerPoint Presentations and lectures to review reading assignments in order to make sure students learn key concepts and information. This teaches the students they don’t have to read and annotate; their teachers will do their work for them.
Cultivating Engaged Readers

- Projects
  - *The Happiness Advantage* (8 weeks)
  - *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (4 weeks)

- Additional Assignments & Activities

This semester I included two major reading assignments: The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor and The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. I crafted assignments based on these readings to encourage student participation. The instructor should select texts that fit his/her interests and objectives. Since many students struggle with challenges, I thought an engaging “how to be happy and successful” book and an award-winning novel that follows a young man through a difficult time would be interesting and relevant.
I introduced The Happiness Advantage with Shawn Achor’s engaging TED Talk. Then I assigned reading the book, breaking it up into introduction and looking forward (the first and final chapters) and the seven chapters focused on each of the seven principles. Students were expected to post 8 times to the discussion board. We then practiced clogging for 21-days (blogging through Laulima) and wrapped the project up with a reflection.
Here’s the link to the TED Talk.

https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work
Here’s Achor’s well researched book. The research is documented throughout, as well as included in the last section. This provides students with an example of researched work.
The Discussion Board posts required students to complete a summary, two to three examples Achor uses to illustrate his point, and a quote that reflects the chapter. Here’s a student example.
Sharon Ahar's "The Happiness Advantage" teaches us that happiness is not the destination of success but rather a pathway to it. Scientific studies have shown how happiness can affect longevity and success over long periods of time. Simply put, happy people are more successful, efficient, and productive.

Happiness is not something easily defined, however, most scientists agree that happiness is having positivity in your life or having something positive to look forward to. Principle 1 of the book tries to explain the correlation between happiness and success. Ahar describes many studies which back up the point, a positive atmosphere will result in better performance. One study showed how medical students were more effective in diagnosing patients after receiving a piece of candy. We should be giving the doctor a popsicle instead of the other way around! Another study, over nearly 100 years, chronicled the lives of nurses through their journals and found nurses that wrote in a positive nature were found to live ten years longer than their clinical counterparts.

I found one conclusion to be especially encouraging. Apparently, acts of kindness are directly related to lower levels of stress and better mental health. When people were told to commit five deliberate acts of kindness each day, they reported feeling much happier than the control group in the study.

Hard work and perseverance are still tools for success but the idea is that people are more apt to work hard when they are happy. Our preconceptions of success bringing happiness must be thrown out. We must first change our way of thinking and how we perceive our lives to allow ourselves to be happy now. Once positivity or happiness creeps into our everyday lives, finding success becomes much more probable.

Here’s another.
And, another.
The Happiness Advantage: Discussion Board Posts

Great quote. I can't count how many times "bad" things have happened only for things to work out SOOOO much better than I expected.

Failing up is a journey to grow, change, and more capable when faced with adversity or failure. Many successful companies and individuals have failed multiple times, but instead of giving up when they did, they continued to learn and improve. The same is true for individuals. No one is immune to the ups and downs of life. The key is to keep moving forward and learning from each challenge.

Rachel

Good summary, quote and examples.

You can improve your summary by including something like, in The Happiness Advantage, Shawn Achor introduces us to Principle 4, Failing Up. This would provide context to a reader who is unfamiliar with the book. Why? Good practice for introducing information in an essay.

Short pat

Dox
In this example, I am modeling the clogging assignment. I blogged on our class blog (Laulima) daily, along with my students. This practice, according to Achor, helps the practitioner develop a new mindset, a happier one that leads to success.
Here is a student's post.

Day 21

I am grateful for the day off, I need to get a lot done.
I am grateful for warm clothes.
I am grateful for my sunny always feeding me.
I ran around the block.
I had time to take a nap to catch up on sleep.
My sunny took all of us out for dinner. Its been awhile since we all went out together but it was enjoyable talking story and eating, but I thanked her after...
Here are posts from another student.

Day 21, February 21st

- I'm grateful for this assignment for helping me realize the things I take for granted.
- I'm grateful for being able to view my actions retrospectively and have a greater understanding of myself and why I'd like to be.
- I'm grateful for this assignment finally being done, as much as I enjoyed doing it everyday, it was to finally have it completed.
- Built an ideal test for my new apartment, so I'm finally getting furniture set up in there. It's finally moving together nicely.
- Got all the books early again in college this semester.
- Received an email before my first class today, so I can't relax and meditate for a while.
- A student was being harassed by someone's people this morning, and she was clearly extremely uncomfortable, so I stepped in to get them to leave.

Day 20, February 20th

- I'm grateful for a nice sleep before work on Thursday.
- I'm grateful for the diversity of food and culture here in Heaven.
- I'm grateful for the ability to work with animals on a daily basis.
- Today came up with an idea or how to layout the furniture in my new apartment that I think will work nicely.
- Wasn't too sick down the road to want to go back to work at the office today, so I'm able to work from home.
- Met someone this morning in the daily update from a student.
- Friend of mine couldn't afford to take the dogs out to a groomer (we can get pretty expensive), so I went over and groomed them for him for free.
Here are posts from another student.
I awarded 1 point for each day (21 days) and a bonus of 4 points if students blogged daily for the 21 days straight.
I reviewed the blogs after the 21-day period was finished, and in fact I gave them another week to make up for lost days.
The Happiness Advantage

Essay Reflection

The last assignment tasked students to reflect on this project and compare their outlook and practices before and after this assignment. It encouraged them to put our 8-week journey in perspective. Many reported a shift in their approach to daily life and felt the book and tasks were relevant.
The next project focused on Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, a novel based on his childhood experiences.
We began this unit with an introduction to Sherman Alexie via his Website and a Bill Moyer Interview. Discussion Board posts were based on chapters and broken into four segments total. Students were then tasked to write their own story based on a childhood experience. Finally, a polished draft will be submitted to WCC’s literary journal, Pueo.
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

- Introduction to Sherman Alexie
  - Bill Moyer Interview

These are the links to the sites.
The Discussion Board posts focused on analyzing and responding to writing techniques, encouraging students to develop an awareness of writerly strategies and prepare them for the future assignment of writing their own fictionalized memoir.
Here is the beginning of one student’s rough draft.

When I was twelve years old, I delivered papers for The Seattle Times. I apologize now for how much you may learn about being a paperboy. My primary tools of the trade were bicycle and a canvas bag holding the papers from end back straining my back. Everyday, every single day, I had to deliver, leaving little free time. Saturday, especially, with friends? No. I had to have all my deliverable papers delivered by 8:00am. I guess it helped that I didn’t have friends.

Well, I had one friend, we’ll call him Bob. Like, not short for Robert. His adopted parents named him Bob I guess. Maybe the name, maybe the adoption, is why he was always trying to assert himself over me. He’d try to grill his palio on me at any opportune time. When he played video games, in concentration, he’d aggressively chew his tongue like the biggest piece of chewing gum. Does it taste good? I never found out why he grilled, chewed or was named Bob. But was my only choice have a dispensary and he’d help me with the route. That only happened a couple times in the two years I had the route anyways, playing video games and snacks from 7-11 at 8:30am, waking my mother. Those were the fun days. My little $12 per month and lack of sleep, and sold 4c in mornings, shoplifting, now wedged in a grill of a poutine hunter drove me to improve my system of stuffing (coupon advertisement inserts) and rather handling the papers. Those were good times...in a manner.

I didn’t realize how devoted to The Seattle Times I was, until, one afternoon, I received a phone call.
Here is the beginning of another student’s rough draft.
During the last week of school, students shared their memoir in class. Afterwards, they submitted their final draft to Pueo, WCC’s literary and art journal for consideration in the next issue.
Here are a number of shorter activities I’ve used to encourage my students to be active and engaged readers. The assignments are included in the handout provided.
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If you have any questions, please contact me.