

The Love of Literacy

*The integration of basic skills
with a meaning approach*



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Foreword

In the midst of sugar cane fields outside of New Orleans in early 1994, I encountered a hurricane – a hurricane of absolute positive force filled with researched, pragmatic and honest educational practices offering a rhyme behind the reason of every highly effective teacher’s move in the classroom. The hurricane swept into my life just days prior to my first day of teaching at East St. John High School in Reserve, Louisiana where I was attending a workshop.

It was a storm I did not seek shelter from. The wind actually provided direction. I naturally gravitated toward its center and made a home there.

The poet Gary Snyder once wrote, “Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there.” During that week-long workshop, I found my place on the planet to be near the eye of that hurricane. With the help of the storm, I started the process of digging in and taking responsibility of my role as teacher and for my place in the classroom.

This educational hurricane was Steve Tattum. I didn’t know it at the time, but this hurricane was to be my life-long mentor.

The speed and passion with which Steve operated during the workshop caused some teachers to batten down the hatches, board up windows and seek refuge. I felt no need to tie myself down. I was ready for the onslaught; in hindsight, this storm was an absolute necessity to my development as an educator and for my path of teaching. The quest to be an effective teacher, to be an agent of change in the lives of students, requires being thrown into disequilibrium. This is where the real work occurs.

I was green: an absolute beginner. Just two months after graduating from college, I was part of Teach for America, a national teacher corps aimed at eliminating educational inequality. I was placed in a self-contained special education classroom. All of my students brought varying labels, from reading disabilities to behavioral disorders. The only advice my principal gave me after handing me the keys to my classroom, a double-wide trailer located behind the school, was to keep my students out of his office.

Steve's training and guidance allowed me to do more than just keep my students out of the principal's office; he provided the tools needed to facilitate success for students who had often struggled with learning. During those intense first days with Steve, I took notes furiously trying to keep up with all the acronyms, reading skills, comprehension strategies and classroom management techniques that swirled around the room. After more than a decade in the classroom and a Master's degree in education, most of what I know about teaching I learned during those five powerful days of training.

After my two-year commitment with Teach for America was completed, I followed Steve to Denver to teach at the Denver Academy, where he was Program Director. At DA, I have seen Steve teach hundreds of student to read and have a successful learning experience. He has trained countless teachers and they in turn have taught thousands more to read. In this way the reading revolution is already taking place. And the reading revolution is of course not just about reading. As Steve writes,

the ability to read impacts a child's confidence, esteem and self-worth. Reading is the key that unlocks entire worlds and opens endless opportunities for our students.

Finding this center, this eye of the storm, does not imply that all problems are solved and understanding of pedagogy is complete. Steve has given me a perspective on education, a place where I can view, analyze, practice, synthesize and evaluate best practices.

Steve's educational storm has been brewing for more than thirty years. This hurricane is now organized and synthesized in book form. Presented as both a narrative and manual, it will revolutionize your way of thinking about education.

Grab your coat and rain boots. The table of contents is your compass. Chart a path to literacy.

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