Why Don’t Students Like School?

“E”ducation makes better minds, and knowledge of the mind can make better education,” writes author Daniel Willingham in *Why Don’t Students Like School?* In this book, Willingham uses a question format for each chapter as he provides nine cognitive principles and classroom applications that teachers can use in their everyday planning and teaching.

Resonating throughout the book is the idea that mental work appeals to both students and adults because it offers opportunities for that “pleasant feeling” when it succeeds. However, when work is overwhelming, we often check out, avoid, and give up.

What seems most applicable to teaching and learning is a discussion about the four factors necessary for successful thinking—information from the environment, facts in long-term memory, procedures in long-term memory, and the amount of space in working memory. Also, data studies about teacher traits most important to students show that students connect personally with teachers they perceive as “nice” and “organized.”

A chapter that focuses on lesson planning stresses the power of stories. Practical ideas for social studies, science, and math lessons are offered to help readers understand story structure for each specific subject. Another chapter on intelligence shares the view that intelligence can be improved and it is important to convince students of this idea. Ideas are provided for classroom implementation.

Although the book is mainly about students and their learning, there is a specific chapter about teacher learning. Teachers who consciously want to improve are offered steps to follow to pursue this endeavor. At the conclusion of the book, a reminder is given to know our students in order to keep them interested and anticipate their reactions in classroom learning.

The title of the book is what invited me to read it. Although a little dry and difficult to read, this would be a perfect book for a Teachers as Readers book group to analyze each chapter, use the practical ideas in the classroom, and then reflect and discuss.

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The principal that is committed to effective communication will be able to offer personnel recognition, praise, and professional regard, while establishing organizational expectations and developing a campus culture that benefits the entire learning community.

*The Principal’s Guide to Managing School Personnel* is a book that I would have benefited from having in my collection years ago. Many of the concepts presented in each chapter, as well as the scenarios, could be related back to experiences that I have had in my principalship. As the title suggests, this book is a guide, a reference source. Each chapter could stand independently, so as situations arise, one could use this source to refresh protocols and offer suggestions on how best to proceed. The authors recommend that school leaders, “Consider every principal-personnel situation to be a learning opportunity that opens the door to increased professional growth and leadership skill development.”

The book is divided into eight chapters in which each one is devoted to a single topic critical to effective personnel relationships. The authors use existing research from a variety of sources to define concepts and illustrate potential techniques to facilitate positive interactions with personnel and to navigate through trying situations. Each chapter contains scenarios to consider and reflective questions.

Chapter 5, “Personnel and Conflict Resolution,” stands out for me. The authors take a positive approach to handling personnel in conflict with one another or with the administration. As the authors state: “Problems are opportunities for teaching. If you really want to have a lasting impact on your students, your faculty, and your community, handle conflict in a way that builds understanding and teaches others to do the same.” As I read this book, I found myself frequently relating the scenarios and concepts to situations that I had experienced. I am already quoting and describing points illustrated in this book to others with whom I work.

I recommend this book, for it reafirmed techniques that I already knew and has encouraged me to examine alternative methods of interaction with personnel. It is a useful resource for school administrators and I will be keeping it readily available as a resource in my daily interactions with others.

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