

## MUSINGS FROM THE NEW KID ON THE *HOTS* BLOCK!

Tuesday afternoon, November 3, I am in a room with my Columbus Magnet School staff and HOTS coach, Marilyn Liberatore, at Wesleyan University's bucolic campus. We are nearing the end of our PD day, and the final task is a TRIBES activity, asking us to share thoughts on the day. The person who has spoken is asked to throw the candy bar towards the person of her choosing. As that candy bar sails in the air in my direction, my mind is suddenly overcome by an intense kaleidoscope of thoughts and memories. What am I going to say? What profound words of wisdom shall I impart to my staff, in the hopes of encouraging and inspiring them to continue embedding the HOTS approach in their instruction? How can I articulate the salient points of the day in front of my coach, who also happens to be my unofficial mentor, assuring her I possess an unwavering will and confidence in my abilities to lead the staff? Did I mention my coach is our school's beloved former principal who brought HOTS to Columbus 15 years ago? Yes, my mind is on overload, and my heartbeat pulsates with an intensity rivaling a Buddy Rich up-tempo drumming solo. I stretch my arms out, open my fingers, and catch that bar. I look around the room, take it all in, and say, "I cannot believe this day happened. I can't believe we are all here. I feel like I just gave birth. This day is my baby." All of that anticipation, rehearsing, pre-thinking, and all I come up with is, "having a baby."

The sentiment received big laughs, but as I thought about it, I had my sincere reasons for expressing those sentiments. My story starts in July-1994, when I enrolled in The Bank Street College of Education Graduate School. As I worked towards my Masters' Degree in Elementary Education, my world opened up to limitless benefits of designing and delivering an integrated, arts inspired curriculum. I could foster critical thinking skills in such a way that was authentic, honest and effortless. This approach was a revelation to a young teacher who attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through college. Fast forward 21 years later, I am appointed principal of our city's magnet school. The first person I met was Marilyn, who provided me with a series of mini PD's on HOTS during the summer, in an unofficial capacity. I was committed to the work. After attending my first Principal's Meeting in early October, I all but pledged my allegiance to HOTS. I wanted to know when the next workshop would take place, and I heard about Teach Like a Pirate by Dave Burgess. "Could I take the whole staff up to Wesleyan? Was it possible? If so, what would we do in the afternoon?" "Having the chance to brainstorm the various scenarios with Amy and then planning the afternoon session with Marilyn assuaged any doubt I might have felt.

Driving home that day left me energized and fulfilled in ways I cannot articulate clearly. We pulled it off and actually had the staff in attendance. Listening to them share how they would infuse new learning into their existing practice is nothing but music to a new principal's ear. I know this is the first of many opportunities we will get to reconnect with HOTS. Rest assured, we are committed to nurturing what we learn, seeking ways to enhance our skills and sharing what we know with other school communities. I am devoted to this work. I love our group. When have I felt this passionate about anything? The time I had my babies.....

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