

chapter
ONE

Why Teach Outrageously in All the Content Areas?

Most teachers enter the teaching profession with an idealistic vision of impacting the lives of their students. They see themselves in a classroom in which their students hang onto their every word. It is of course a rude awakening when they actually first enter a classroom to teach, and find that they must fight for their students' attention and interest. It is a battle that is often lost.

As many teachers realize, conventional approaches to content instruction, even approaches employing state-of-the-art, best-practice strategies, are often inadequate for serving the large percentage of students in public schools who are reluctant, superficial, or resistant learners. They are often inadequate for meeting standards-based content objectives, even in high-performing schools. If anything, the problem of student disengagement is becoming more prevalent due to a combination of social problems, such as poverty and the increasing availability of on-demand entertainment options for filling one's time outside of school. Indeed, veteran teachers often report that it is increasingly difficult to hold students' attention.

A major challenge for teachers is how best to motivate and engage students who are discouraged or underachieving their true potential. Underperforming learners, be they students born into poverty or from advantaged backgrounds, often do not see purpose in what they are taught and respond with boredom, apathy, and misbehavior. Conventional approaches to instruction have been inadequate in reversing the low achievement and high dropout rates now prevalent in all too many schools. Dropouts report that boredom is a major contributor to their

decision to leave school. There are also large numbers of reluctant learners who do well generally but have lost motivation to learn in a particular content area. Examples include students who have decided that they are “mathphobic” or that science is not “cool.” Alternatively, they may find it impossible to understand selected key topics within content areas that are crucial to future success.

Student boredom and the resultant misbehavior are also major factors behind the high turnover rate among new teachers, who are simply unable to hold students’ interest and consequently have to spend inordinate amounts of time trying to maintain order. This inability is typically viewed as not having the skills to maintain discipline. However, the discipline problems themselves are symptomatic of teachers not having the stagecraft and presence to hold their students’ attention.

Indeed, little has changed since Charles Silberman documented the absolute boredom of students in the typical classroom in high-poverty schools in his classic book *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education* (1971). The experience of walking through a high-poverty school is much the same today as it was thirty or a hundred years ago. The dominant expression on the faces of disadvantaged students is generally boredom or resignation. The same is true when teachers in all schools and in any content area teach particular lessons and units. *But this need not be so!* And that is why this book was written.

It is time to recognize that this era of on-demand, individualized, and YouTubed entertainment is producing as fundamental a shift in communication and learning patterns today as the printing press did 550 years ago. The key to teaching reluctant and resistant learners who have grown up with unsurpassed access to on-demand entertainment is to transform the classroom into a highly intriguing learning environment, to make it entertaining, dramatic, visually captivating, and a multisensory experience.

It is time to accept that we cannot always teach content conventionally! This approach does not work anymore for most students. Unfortunately, even if you agree with this sentiment, chances are that you teachers were not trained in how to produce highly creative unconventional instructional environments that can increase learning. Nor were you administrators trained to encourage the use of unconventional instructional approaches as part of a systematic approach to school improvement.

But even if you did want to create very dramatic learning environments, most of the published work on using drama and humor focuses primarily on using

them to develop the literacy or self-expression skills of young children, to review and reinforce what has been learned conventionally, or to develop students' artistic sense. All of these are important uses of dramatic techniques. However, they only scratch the surface of the potential of using dramatic instructional approaches.

MOVING FROM CONVENTIONAL TO OUTRAGEOUS TEACHING

The ideal is possible. We can transfix students even while teaching seemingly prosaic content. Later in this book you will read about lessons in which hard-core problem students and classes in the toughest schools were transfixed and hanging on every word and gesture of their teacher. When that happens, it is an inspirational and fun moment for the teacher as well. After even one such experience, student and teacher come to view each other differently—with mutual heightened respect and admiration.

The big need is for a practical way to use dramatic approaches as a primary technique for teaching new content across the curriculum in grades 4 through 12—that is, to teach the content Outrageously. Outrageous Teaching is a powerful tool for all teachers to use to stimulate learning in those lessons and students for which conventional instruction is not likely to be effective. This book goes beyond conventional notions of using dramatic technique in education. The goal is to use dramatic technique, humor, and imagination in combination to create lessons that are so different from conventional instruction, and so far out, that the only words to characterize them are *Outrageous* and *amazingly effective*.

What is Outrageous Teaching and why is it so effective? Why is it able to captivate reluctant and resistant learners and squirrely classes? Why is it able to stimulate high levels of learning in otherwise passive or confused students? Can drama and humor really be the basis of a large-scale tool for improving content instruction and increasing academic achievement? To understand what Outrageous Teaching is and why it is so effective, it is important first to understand dramatic technique, the base on which the method is built.

DEFINITION OF DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE

Some key components of drama are as follows:

“A composition . . . intended to portray life or character or to tell a story usually involving conflict and emotions through action and dialogue. . . .”
(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

“Exciting, tense, and gripping . . . either in a work of art or in a real-life situation.” (Encarta World English Dictionary)

“‘A deed’ or ‘an action.’ So anytime you’ve acted something out, you’ve done drama!” (“The Play’s The Thing: Drama Definition,” retrieved from <http://jfg.girlscouts.org/how/girlslife/dramadef.htm>. *Note:* This site no longer exists. The quote currently appears at http://suzynarita.blogspot.com/2004_12_01_archive.html.)

“A collective experiencing, celebrating, or commenting, not on how we are different from each other, but on what we share. . .” (Bolton, 2001, p. 154).

On the basis of these definitions, this book views classroom use of dramatic technique as

Teacher actions that turn lessons into a collective experience by creating a story or context that produces excitement and other emotions central to acquiring and consciously processing the key content ideas and knowledge.

Although this definition includes what most educators think of as drama—that is, theatrical productions—it is a much broader definition that includes all aspects of artistic expression that performers—in this case, teachers—can use to create a dramatic tension that enthralls and draws in an audience—in this case, their students.

THE POWER OF DRAMA AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

Dramatizing content instruction has tremendous potential for teaching students who have not been successful learners or are intimidated by a particular subject or type of content, because it taps into their deeply held emotions and beliefs, their imagination, their sense of life’s possibilities, and their role in the cosmos. As such, it is the most underused and powerful teaching technique in American education.

Philosophers as far back as Confucius and Aristotle have been fascinated with the power of drama as a teaching tool, as evidenced by the following quotes:

“I hear, I know. I see, I remember. I do, I understand.” (Confucius, 551 B.C.–479 B.C. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/c/confucius.html>)

“Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand.” (Attributed to Aristotle by some and said to be a Chinese Proverb by others; originally retrieved from <http://www.geocities.com/broadway/alley/3765/why.html>—*Note:* This site no longer exists. In addition, another version of this quote has as the middle phrase, “Show me and I may remember.”)

Indeed, drama has been used as a teaching technique since ancient times. (See the history of drama use in Appendix A.)

Dramatic practices are also widely used in the modern classroom. Many teachers are already familiar with conventional techniques that engage students in role-playing, improvisations, games, and simulated experiences. These practices are most often used to “supplement” lessons previously taught—to develop particular skills, such as reading fluency; to deepen understanding of a particular content topic; or to review and reinforce learning. Although these practices are important, they barely scratch the surface of the potential of using dramatic technique as a teaching and learning tool.

The method featured in this book places great importance on the role of the teacher in incorporating dramatic practices into the design and staging of the original content instruction, rather than first teaching the content conventionally. The goal of these practices is to capture the attention of students at the onset of the content instruction, and to gain their willingness and commitment to fulfill specified content learning objectives.

DEFINING OUTRAGEOUS TEACHING

Most conceptions of using drama to teach content involve first teaching a lesson using conventional approaches and then using dramatic techniques such as student role-plays, reader’s theater, games, and simulations to review, reinforce, and deepen the learning. Although the conventional reinforcement approach to using dramatic technique is valuable, it tends to be inefficient. In other words, you are basically teaching the content objectives twice—first conventionally and then using dramatic technique to reinforce it. Why not just teach the content from the beginning using the more creative, enriched approach? That is the goal of Outrageous Teaching.

Outrageous Teaching is not designed to replace all instruction. However, for those lessons and content objectives that a teacher has decided will be of greatest

value, Outrageous Teaching is used as *the* primary teaching approach. It is how the content objectives are taught from the very beginning—as opposed to being merely a supplemental approach. In Outrageous Teaching, the teacher teaches the same lessons he or she would teach using conventional methods, covering the same content, but in a very different, far more compelling fashion. No lessons are added to a unit to incorporate Outrageous Teaching. Outrageous Teaching is thus the first classroom use of dramatic technique that does not require incorporating additional lessons to teach content in an enriched fashion.

Outrageous Teaching integrates humor, imagination, and dramatic technique to develop inventive storylines that provide a context that seems important to students in terms of how they think. For most of the lesson, students have no idea what the content objective is—even as they are learning the content. In the early parts of the lesson, a sense of suspense is created and students do not recognize what the teacher is trying to accomplish or the reasons for the teacher's behavior. All they know is that whatever is happening seems interesting and strange.

The storyline also contains a dilemma that students are called on to resolve and, in doing so, to unknowingly, at first, learn and apply the formal content. The more Outrageous the storyline is, the better it is. (The specific techniques for creating such storylines and for planning Outrageous lessons are presented in Chapter 4, and examples of real lessons and storylines are presented in Chapter 5.)

This form of teaching is called Outrageous Teaching because although the same content objectives are being taught as in conventional teaching, the resulting lessons are different from and more imaginative than those taught by conventional teaching methods. Outrageous Teaching provides a whole new motivation and a new context for the student learning to occur in.

Outrageous Teaching is equally applicable across all content areas in grades 4 through 12, and equally applicable to all students and to all content objectives. The techniques are especially valuable for lessons in which all the other techniques a teacher has tried have failed to create student interest or understanding, or to engage resistant and reluctant learners.

Outrageous Teaching is a powerful tool that all teachers can employ to

- Increase simultaneously, in powerful ways, how much students learn and their interest in learning.
- Deepen understanding.
- Enrich the quality of school life for both teacher and student while creating new bonds between them.

- Involve students who previously have not responded to conventional instruction, whether across the board, in specific content areas, or in meeting specific content objectives.

Indeed, although Outrageous Teaching derives from the traditions of dramatic technique and humor, the methodology provides a practical way to operationalize other progressive conceptions such as constructivism and discovery learning.

Of course the best way to understand Outrageous Teaching is to observe an example of it. (All of the sample lessons and units in this book are highlighted.)

DWIGHT'S OUTRAGEOUS LESSON: INTRODUCTION

What does Outrageous Teaching look like?

Let me introduce a lesson taught by one of my student teachers, whom I will call Dwight, to a class of high school sophomores.

The Lesson Begins

The students file in, and once they are settled, the teacher announces that Dwight is home sick today but a special guest is coming to make them an exciting offer.

The visitor then arrives. He has a huge, bushy white beard; wears a tall, Amish-style black hat; is dressed in overalls; and carries a tree stump. He emphatically puts the tree stump on the floor and announces in a booming voice:

I am a master salesman and have heard that all of you in this room have wonderful social skills and would make great salespeople. I am here as part of a national search to find the next generation of salespeople to sell a new, exciting line of products, the next great product, a complete line of stumps!

By now the students have recognized Dwight and are starting to titter a bit, although they are also curious. Dwight continues:

I see that you are skeptical about the importance and sales potential of stumps. Well, let me tell you all the things you can do with stumps and I am sure that in five minutes you are all going to want to know where you can buy one.

What Is Going On?

Dwight is teaching a traditional content objective that is very hard to communicate and get students interested in. Most of them struggle with learning the content. What objective do you think he is addressing? And in what content area do you think he is teaching?

Hint: He is not teaching a woodworking shop course, and he is not preparing students to learn how to use a chainsaw.

If Dwight is correctly using the techniques described in this book, at this point you should be as much in the dark as the students are about what is going on. Dwight's opening is not just a spur-of-the-moment idiosyncratic creative outburst, nor is he being Outrageous for the sake of being Outrageous. Dwight is using, in a very conscious manner, specific techniques described later in this book, and the lesson is designed to teach a critical content objective.

You will be exposed to more of Dwight's lesson in subsequent chapters.

WHY TEACH OUTRAGEOUSLY?

As you might assume, daring to conduct a lesson such as the one taught by Dwight might take more preparation time, not to mention a bit of courage. Why go to this trouble? Why does Dwight feel it is worth the effort and daring to make a critical content objective come alive for his students?

Teaching the Reluctant or Resistant Learner

Some students have become reluctant to learn from conventional instruction and others actively resist such learning. They have stopped responding across the board and are unmotivated, or unable, to make more than minimal effort. They find conventional instruction boring or unenlightening. Other students do not understand what is being taught even when and if they try to learn it. Such students are disproportionately composed of students born into poverty, minority students, those whose native language is not English, and those with special needs. As these students experience difficulty and even failure, their reluctance to learn turns to active resistance. This results in social concerns about inequity in educational outcomes—the unfortunate learning gap.

One of the revelations that teachers often experience when they teach an Outrageous lesson is that reluctant and resistant students suddenly emerge and shine and their innate intelligence comes to the fore. Many students who have not

responded to conventional approaches or other suggested best practices suddenly seem to come alive. The emergence of such students is not only a revelation to the teacher but also an affirmation to the student that he or she really can excel and that the classwork is relevant and interesting.

Other reluctant learners are highly motivated and do well generally but have a dread and a seeming inability to learn the concepts of particular types of content. Math phobia, whether real or imagined, is an example. Most students dread certain academic areas or content topics, and all teachers do not look forward to teaching particular lessons and units because they know that students will have trouble or purposely resist. We all, whether students or teachers, are weak in certain academic areas. For example, as a student I was able to understand the intimidating subject of calculus but could not grasp the details of chemistry, and almost all of the middle and high school students I taught had trouble with math word problems.

What were your weak content areas and topics as a student? I suspect you would have benefited if your teachers had used some Outrageous Teaching, and your students will benefit if you use it now to teach selected learning objectives.

Finally, some students generally do well but learn superficially. They learn by relying on their memory, or they want to learn only what they need to know to answer test questions correctly. Such students are reluctant to understand the deeper meaning or inferences of what they are learning. These reluctant learners generally do well in the early years of schooling but are at a disadvantage at some point later on.

Reducing the Learning Gap

The learning gap in our public schools is one of the most vexing social problems facing our society. As education becomes more important in achieving economic success, a persistently large gap remains between the performance of white students and that of African Americans and Latinos. The gap exists when students start school, and grows ever larger after the fourth grade. Progress was made in reducing the gap between 1965 and 1988, but it widened again thereafter. (You can examine the national trend of the learning gap by downloading the National Center for Educational Statistics' report card *Trends in Academic Progress* from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2005/2005464.pdf>. The graphs on page 33 show that the black-white reading gap for thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds was smaller in 1988 than in 2004.) The consequences for

individuals of color are higher dropout rates and fewer opportunities after school. The consequences for society are the continued marginalization of a substantial portion of our population and a major social inequity.

Recent reform efforts to reduce the learning gap have relied on conceptions of learning from behavioral psychology, which view poor test performance as simply lack of knowledge, and students as vessels that have simply to be filled up with knowledge. If they have not learned it, teach it again, and again, and again—the same way. *Pound it in!* Some schools are now teaching basic reading skills three hours a day in an effort to get test scores up.

This approach simply has not worked. As recently as 2005, after a decade of such reform, results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that approximately half of urban black and Hispanic students are not meeting basic standards in fourth grade reading. Another effect of sole reliance on simplistic instructional approaches is the high dropout rate. A recent study funded by the Gates Foundation found that almost half of high school dropouts report being bored with what was being taught (Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison, 2006).

Clearly, relying on force-feeding content to students is not reducing the learning gap. Something more, or something else, is needed. Judicious use of Outrageous Teaching provides potential to produce substantially higher and deeper learning outcomes and test scores for reluctant and resistant learners than relying only on traditional, or teach-to-the-test, approaches. *Indeed, Outrageous lessons and units are viewed as key tools for reducing the learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.*

It is therefore important that Outrageous Teaching not follow the traditional pattern, in which progressive techniques are adopted only in high socioeconomic status schools. Although the techniques are appropriate for such schools, I hope they will also be widely adopted for teaching those reluctant and resistant learners who were born into poor families, they can make an even bigger difference, and help solve one of our most vexing social problems: the learning gap.

Yellow Feathers, Pus, and Warfare: Tapping into Students' Sense of Culture and Reality

The biggest cultural shock that many students face when they first arrive in school is that *the teacher is not wearing yellow feathers*. Research has shown that students raised in caring, low-income homes generally have substantially less verbal interaction with adults at home compared to their peers from moderate

and high-income households (Hart and Risley, 1995). As a result, most of their preschool learning comes from passive TV watching. Even children from higher-income households are raised on a heavy diet of TV. Children who grow up watching Sesame Street and other cartoons and video games come to view learning as watching animated characters engaged in dramatic situations and getting new information from dramatic contexts. When they walk into the first grade classroom, the culture shock is that the teacher is not a big bird—there is no costume, no graphics, no animation, and no compelling dramatic contexts. There is just an adult talking . . . and talking . . . and talking!

My point is not to argue that such massive passive learning from entertainment is good. Rather, schools need to recognize the dissonance experienced by students when they enter dramaless learning environments such as those typically found in American classrooms—particularly now that we are so sensitive to other forms of cultural disconnect. We have made great strides in making instruction more sensitive to students' cultural heritage relative to race and ethnicity. We continue, however, to ignore the need to gear instruction to the cultural sense of youth—in other words, to the shared experiences of youth worldwide in learning from dramatic contexts.

Educators also need to recognize that the dramatic contexts of TV shows and YouTube promote powerful forms of learning. Of course our students are often learning things we would prefer they did not. Indeed, there is an old joke that TV is called a medium because it is seldom well done. At the same time, it makes sense for schools to capitalize on the power of dramatic contexts to teach that which we in fact do want students to learn.

Whenever educators address the issue of cultural differences, they always gravitate immediately to thinking in terms of racial and ethnic differences. Although these differences are important, there is a cultural divide that is generally ignored and that is limiting the usefulness of instructional approaches. This ignored cultural divide is between “kidness” and adulthood.

Kids all over the world share bonds of knowledge and perspective that are outside the realm of what most adults know and experience. Youngsters in Harlem, New York, and youth in Bush, Alaska, who have access to satellite TV and the Internet can have more knowledge and perspectives in common than they have with the adults in their own community. I could design a test of cultural knowledge that these seemingly disparate students would all pass but that the adults in both communities would fail.

The use of drama and humor to design highly creative and unusual lessons is a way to engage students' natural experiences and instincts in a productive learning process, regardless of whether the students are at the "yellow feathers" stage (that is, the elementary level), the "pus" stage (that is, the middle school level, where students are increasingly fascinated with their bodies and the changes occurring there), or the "warfare" stage (that is, the high school level, where senses of turf, place, and interest are increasingly set in place).

Transitioning from "Authentic" to "Creatively Authentic" Learning

Conventional instruction often strives to stimulate learning by providing "authentic" learning experiences. The teacher tries to convince students that something is important to them now because it will be important to them when they become adults. *But the students are not adults.* Indeed, many of them may even be rebelling against or intimidated by adults and adulthood—which can cause them to further rebel against learning the content. Such a seemingly progressive notion of instruction is in effect a capitulation to the notion that it is impossible to make the ideas important to students in their current state, and is in effect a demeaning view of what students are capable of appreciating and responding to. The concept of authentic instruction is in reality a diminished view of the craft of teaching and of students' capabilities.

Creatively Authentic instruction, on the other hand, seeks to make the same ideas and content important and intelligible to students on the basis of the "culture of kidness." It seeks to tap into students' views of what life is about and what is important to them. Although the young are immature in many ways, they do have heightened insight into important human concepts such as fairness and friendship that are often eroded in the adult world. Outrageous instruction is built around Creative Authenticity, i.e., teaching what adults want students to learn, but teaching it in a context that is consistent with students' cultural view of life.

Connecting with High School Adolescents

High school teachers at general education conferences often lament that almost all of the innovative ideas seem to be geared to younger students. In addition, the general reaction to dramatic technique is usually, "It will work fine at the elementary level, but it will never work at the high school level, or with complex instructional and learning objectives, or with jaded students." The fact that Outrageous lessons are as effective at the high school level as they

are with fourth graders means that middle and high school teachers have an important additional tool for reaching their students in powerful ways. Examples of Outrageous Teaching being used effectively to teach complex content and difficult classes at the high school level—including with low-performing seniors—are provided throughout the book.

Outrageous Teaching is more than just an additional tool, however. Even a single lesson is a transformative experience for teachers. It reaffirms their craft skills, and it feels like a pioneering achievement, because it is probably the first time the content objective has ever been taught that way. It hones, recalibrates, and affirms one's instincts about what is possible.

In addition, Outrageous Teaching builds a new relationship between the students and the teacher. Barriers fall and are replaced by mutual respect. Students react to such lessons as evidence that their teacher really cares about their learning and is willing to go the extra mile and take chances to make sure they succeed. After such a lesson, students respond more positively even to conventional instruction and feel heightened respect for their teacher. Teachers also gain a new perspective on the creative and thinking capabilities of their students, particularly of those who have been reluctant and resistant learners.

IS THERE A METHOD TO DWIGHT'S OUTRAGEOUSNESS?

Although the notion of using drama or any art form to increase the pragmatic outcomes of content learning and improve test scores may seem counterintuitive or a sellout of the artistic ideal, the goal of theater has always been to increase the audience's awareness of something. Using highly dramatic techniques to increase content learning is a natural extension of the theatrical tradition, and it produces powerful results. Indeed, the root of progressive advocacy in favor of incorporating drama into education was the desire to teach content in more effective and meaningful ways.

Nevertheless, it is not obvious how drama and humor and imagination can be used to teach content in ways that provide a consistent advantage over conventional instruction. To accomplish this purpose, formal methodologies are needed, along with a knowledge base of accumulated experience. Methodology is used in all the creative arts. Dancers have choreography, musicians have instruments and music notation. Similarly, a methodology is needed for organizing the kind of highly creative instruction that is described and advocated in this book.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology of being constructively Outrageous, which I have called the Dramatized Content Planning Method.

WHY IS DWIGHT TEACHING AN OUTRAGEOUS LESSON?

The short answer to the question of why Dwight was teaching an Outrageous lesson is that I required it of my student teachers. Yet once he started planning the lesson, his work became a genuine exploration of technique and of his own ability to be highly creative with a “difficult” class. He wanted to discover if he could teach unconventionally without losing control of his class or looking foolish. Would students buy into his ideas? Would they pay attention? Would they learn?

These are questions that all teachers could reasonably ask, regardless of how experienced they are when they explore a new, very different technique. These questions were of particular concern to Dwight given his inexperience, and that this class was one with which he had gotten frustrated. I had observed this class several times. It was a difficult one to teach because the majority of the students did not like to participate, and some even delighted in being unruly. Most simply enjoyed looking bored and spacing out. I came to think of them as “loungers.” They had little passion for learning. On most days, the first fifteen minutes of the period were lost to student groans and excuses, requests for pencils, requests to go to the bathroom, and so on. It was worse on days when Dwight introduced a new topic. Teaching this content using conventional instructional methods was like passing a kidney stone, so he was apprehensive about how the class would respond to an Outrageous lesson.

Perhaps a better question to ask is, Why did Dwight pick that particular lesson to teach Outrageously?

The lesson Dwight picked was the first one in a unit that the district had defined as a major learning objective. It was a critical lesson. It was also one that teachers throughout the district had trouble teaching to most students. He also knew that the lesson and unit would bore his students to the point of resisting and stalling them using the wide array of techniques that sophomores have available for such purposes.

As Dwight’s lesson unfolds in subsequent chapters, keep in mind that he had not already taught the lesson conventionally. This was the first time the students were taught this critical content. This was *the* learning experience. And even though for the most part Dwight would teach the follow-up lessons

conventionally, this first lesson provided a context that he used to bind together his subsequent teaching for the remainder of the unit.

What was the content objective? Was the lesson successful? Did Dwight or the students get splinters? Did he get reprimanded by his principal? Was he ostracized by other teachers? Stay tuned.

Can You Teach Like Dwight?

Yes! Keep in mind that Dwight was not an extrovert or a jokester by nature. Nor was he very experienced. His lesson was a calculated professional process. Therefore, if someone as inexperienced as Dwight could change his persona for a lesson and make it effective, anyone can. He was merely tapping into the wellspring of imagination that all teachers have, and attempting to tap into his students' senses of imagination, wonder, and hope. When that happens, all things are possible, and I think you will be amazed at the results of Dwight's lesson.

The lessons we can learn from Dwight's instruction and from the other examples of Outrageous Teaching presented in this book are as follows:

- Any teacher can create terrific Outrageous lessons and units, and although such lessons require a bit more planning than traditional lessons, the results are worth it, and a little bit goes a long way.
- Any content lesson, no matter how boring and pedantic, can be converted into a riveting Outrageous lesson that increases student learning, interest, and retention.
- Creating Outrageous instruction is only a matter of thinking in divergent, creative, and weird ways.
- Although this form of teaching is beneficial for all students, it is of particular value for reluctant and resistant learners, and it is a critical tool for reducing the learning gap.

Yes! You can be like Dwight and all the other teachers whose Creatively Authentic Outrageous lessons and units are described in the upcoming chapters.

Although teachers often instinctively respond to the notion of drama and being dramatic as "that is not me," the reality is that all good teachers use drama to some degree. Indeed, it may be impossible to teach a really good conventional lesson without the use of dramatic technique. Even maintaining discipline requires the use of dramatic elements. Discipline is not just laying down the rules. It is also

adopting a convincing persona. The persona may be one of kindness or of marshal order (“Grave things will happen if you transgress”). In any case, something you do has to convince students that they should obey you.

So, chances are you already use dramatic technique. Outrageous Teaching merely requires you to embellish these techniques in a more imaginative fashion to reach a different goal—enhancing content learning.

SUMMARY

Advances made in knowledge about curriculum and learning have not been matched by progress in making learning fascinating to the vast majority of underachieving learners. Teachers have tremendous untapped creative potential that is critical to improving education in a wide variety of dimensions, from increasing student interest in a given content area to general school improvement and to reducing the learning gap. It is time to tap this creativity to create more dynamic learning environments for reluctant and underperforming and resistant learners.

Organizing Outrageous lessons in grades 4 through 12 requires only a vivid imagination and courage. It does not require special training beyond reading this book. Because such lessons require extra planning, the methods offered here should be used strategically, where they can do the most good. If Dwight and the other student teachers could develop tremendously creative and effective Outrageous lessons, experienced teachers certainly can. In addition, because Outrageous Teaching techniques focus on teaching the content objectives that are already in the curriculum, the methods suggested here are consistent with the push for accountability and standards. More important, however, the use of Outrageous lessons and units represents good practice under any conditions, and provides high levels and unique types of satisfaction for both teachers and students. *They are also lots of fun for everyone!*