

# Teacher to Teacher

Department of Defense Education Activity

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## Let's Spread the Good News!

By Millie Harris

During our 2001 DoDEA Teacher of the Year Forum in Washington during American Education Week last November, teachers spoke of all the good things that happen in schools. This edition includes a story of a former teacher who served as an inspiration, the reasons why a fellow teacher loves coming to work, some districts' best practices, and how teachers have grown professionally through establishing their own study group. Members of this TOY class of 2001 use their teacher voices to spread the good news of how teachers do make a difference.

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## Growth through Group Study at Fort Benning

By Millie Harris  
DoDEA 2001 Teacher of the Year

Thirteen teachers of Stowers Elementary at Fort Benning, GA joined together to form a study group for professional and personal growth. The group read Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (1988) and met weekly for group discussions, learning how to apply the habits to become better teachers.

The group gained knowledge of how teachers can become empowered through focusing their efforts on matters over which they have control. We can decide that "Kim can't read" because of her poor home life, her inattention, or her learning disability. Anytime we think the problem is "out there," the reactive language of "there's nothing I can do" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, when teachers face such challenges, they need to adopt a proactive attitude of "I can be more resourceful," or "I can be more diligent," so "Kim will read."

The members gained insight as to how we need to define what is really important, keep that vision in mind and manage themselves to do what matters most for our students. Most failures begin with the lack of an objective or with a deficient plan. If we tackle each day with our purpose in mind, as challenges come, we can make value-based decisions. Each teacher should have a vision. Without it, we falter.

Finally, these teachers learned how to make their schedules congruent with their desired results by setting priorities. We can find ourselves very busy without being very effective. Being an effective teacher is *putting first things first*. Good teachers possess the integrity to place their personal feelings or desires subordinate to a higher purpose – that of educating our youth.

The Seven Habits Study Group formed a consensus that effective teaching is all about attitudes, principles and priorities. Good teachers take the initiative to do whatever it takes, consistent with the right principles, to get the job done.

Our group formed a bond and a commitment to life-long learning. We are interested in having other teachers' recommendations for our next growth project. Please email me with your suggestions. Who knows...maybe we can network with other DoDEA teachers to form a world-wide community of life-long learners.





## Getting High on Teaching

By Bill Douglas

2001 Korea District Teacher of the Year

This may sound strange, but I'm really proud to be a teacher. I like what I do and what I teach. I enjoy spending my day with teenagers, even though it is often filled with challenges that stretch the limits of patience and self-control. Only teachers know that teenagers today are not all "bad", as news reports would have one believe. The majority of teenagers are responsible young adults and they keep me feeling young. I learn something new from them almost every day. Here is another strange fact - I'm in the middle of my 37<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and my 35<sup>th</sup> year with DoDDS. If this seems unreal to those just starting their careers, don't worry - it seems unreal to me too. It seems as if I started just about ten years ago! My wife (from a family of teachers) and I have raised two children entirely overseas, much to the puzzlement of our families and friends in the U. S. Our children thrived in various DoDDS schools from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and were extremely successful in universities in various parts of the United States.

This past September, my district superintendent called me to say that I had been selected as Teacher of the Year for my school district. I was astonished and immediately thought, "Didn't any young dynamic teachers apply for this? Didn't anyone on the selection

committee know how old I was?" "Aren't old teachers supposed to be 'tired and worn out' and 'over the hill' and 'not in touch with what is REALLY happening?'" How confusing! I was "blown away" what with the modern emphasis on "youth" and the prevailing ideas that "we can hire two of them for what we are paying YOU" (as if that was anywhere near what I was really worth).

DoDEA brings all Teachers of the Year to Washington, DC, now, and becoming a part of the Teacher of the Year Forum this past November was a highlight of my career. Listening to other educators from other districts and hearing Teachers of the Year from other parts of the United States voice their opinions I share about education added validity to my own teaching career. The 2000 Teacher of the Year representing the United States, Marilyn Whirry (my age) was right on target with her assessment of public education in our country today. She expressed concerns about the lack of respect for teachers and for education in general. Marilyn advocated the implementation and maintenance of high standards for curriculum. She encouraged us to remain proud of being teachers, to remain strong in the face of adversity, and to remember how much our students need us in their lives.

I wrote in my application for Teacher of the Year that I was really proud of being a teacher and that I felt that teachers should try to make the things they teach count. We should be able to show students how our subject areas apply in the scheme of lifelong learning. I want my students to enjoy and benefit from what they study in my classes, but there are other things I want them to learn each day, as well. I want them to learn respect for themselves, their work and the work of others. I want them to do their best in any area of study, to be able to read and follow directions carefully, and to put in a full day's work for a full day's pay. I want them to

take pride in even routine things such as arriving to class on time because it says something about their character. I want them to know that I don't expect them to be perfect, but that I do expect them to learn how to correct their human errors cheerfully and carefully - and then to learn from their mistakes.

Many of my educator friends, teachers and administrators, are either retired or are looking forward to the "quiet life" far away from grade cards, bomb threats, irate "baby boomer" parents, WinSchool, and the "me" generation with its youthful insolence and arrogance. They keep saying, "I don't know why you do it. Why do you stay?" Well, here it is - I still awaken each day looking forward to starting my day at school. I look forward to going to school, preparing for classes, seeing the students come in, grading papers, and sitting in meetings. I love it all. When all of that stops I will know it is time to leave. I do get tired, but I'm not perpetually tired. I feel like I'm still in touch with life, with the modern students, and with my teaching field. DoDDs still calls on me for curriculum work. Sure, I can't deny that I'm older, but I still feel like I'm pedaling "up the hill" along with everyone else, as opposed to being "over it" (which implies out of it).

However, I've told my principal that if I'm sighted tottering around in the hallways, seem to have lost my sense of direction (not to mention my students and my sanity) to get me out quickly on a stretcher. He says he will know, and I trust him.

Look for articles in our next edition of *Teacher to Teacher* from:

Deborah Roth, Wuerzburg District  
Peggy Anderson, Fort Stewart  
DDESS

Amy Insley, Fort Knox DDESS  
Mary Hetter, Camp Lejuene  
DDESS

James Pearson, Virginia DDESS  
Randi Skelley, Japan District  
Debra Knudsen, Hessen District

**MAKE IT REAL**By **Julie Wallace**2001 Puerto Rico DDESS District Teacher of the Year  
and **Cindy Costa**

Roosevelt Roads Middle/High School, January Teacher of the Month



In our changing world, with modern communication technology and working parents, we have less opportunity to interact with people rather than with screens. More and more students are lacking social, communication, and leadership skills. At Roosevelt Roads Middle/High School there is a leadership class that interacts with, leads, and involves an entire student body (grades 6-12) in projects requiring myriad leadership skills. The focus is caring and providing for others. This class has planned, organized, and led activities, including fund-raisers, that made reaching their goals possible. Meet the creator of the class, Cindy Costa, Roosevelt Roads Middle/High

School's January Teacher of the Month, as she explains the leadership program she has designed, which has set an example and goals for all students at our school. Cindy Costa's story follows:

I teach a class called Leadership, but I believe the course title is a misnomer. Remember when we used to take a class called Civics? I think I took it as a freshman. That's where we learned about our rights as citizens, but it's also where we learned about our responsibilities. All my teachers seemed to preach that combination; rights just didn't come without responsibilities, for a number of reasons.

Leadership class at Roosevelt Roads, however, is a hands-on learning classroom in the real world. Every year more students sign up for the class than I have seats in the room. I go through my litany of class requirements and expectations, actually encouraging students to go to the counselor for a schedule change if they feel they cannot carry their class loads. Though they don't have to read thirty pages a night and be prepared for daily quizzes, they do have to participate in all class activities, which include team-building exercises, cooperative learning endeavors, organizational and planning sessions, to list just a few. In addition, they must be willing to work before school, during break, after school, and on weekends to accomplish all our self-directed activities. Then, (and this is the BIGGIE) they must do the right thing always. If they don't, they must take the HOT SEAT, a type of classroom pillory where I publicly reprimand them for any discipline referrals they receive in school (including tardiness), as well as any inappropriate behavior they engage in at school, on the base, off base, or in the world. (No, I really don't go out and spy on them; I just somehow hear all kinds of things from other students and teachers, often in casual conversation.) They must then make reparation in a way the class and I see fit, and it also affects their grade in my class. Then I hit them with the next requirement; twenty community service hours above and beyond the twenty required by the school for graduation. They mumble and groan a little, but they still don't leave.

So why do they elect to stay in the class? Why don't they jump up in hordes to run out the door? Could it be that they want discipline and guidelines? Could it be that they want to feel needed and appreciated for something they know they worked for and earned? I think so. Dare I say, I know so. I've been doing this for ten years now, and even though our students know all kinds of technical skills, they are still lacking in communication skills and knowing how to relate and share with others.

I believe it is because they feel a need to be involved in a community. Unfortunately, military installations can only provide part of a community. There is no place in the military for a home for old folks, and grandparents often just come for a short visit, so they have no interaction with a huge segment of our society on a regular basis. The military does not routinely care for AIDS patients either or for terminally ill children. So, we go into the community off base and interact with these people. We have adopted two different senior citizen homes, one in Ceiba and another in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. We have painted walls, installed ceiling fans, provided Christmas trees and gifts for the elderly, played dominoes with them, and bought washing machines for them with money from our fundraisers. We have held huge food drives for abused women and children that involved the whole school, and recently we just purchased another washing machine for the AIDS hospice. We clean up beaches, help hurricane victims, and mentor younger children. We also provide breakfast every Friday (hot ham and cheese sandwiches and juice). My students do everything to make that happen: shop for supplies (including getting up very early to buy the hot bakery bread at 6:30 A.M.), ... *story continued on page 4*



## It's My Way or The Highway!

By Fumi Marquez

2001 Guam District Teacher of the Year



Two Guam High School teachers could adopt 'It's my way or the highway' as their educational philosophy. Stewart Foster and his wife Tracy are teachers in the Guam district who have implemented Service Learning, which is a way to connect the curriculum to the needs in the community.

Not unlike many communities, they saw a community need to include parents in the educational process. They have done this by creating a computer-based game which follows the Pan American Highway. Students research Central America and use the information to create questions based on their findings. Parents are encouraged to help their child research and are asked to sign an acknowledgment that their child has shared information with them. Then these questions are incorporated into PowerPoint as multiple choice answers. Correct answers allow students to travel quickly and successfully down the Pan American Highway. Then they are ready for Game Day! Game Day is held two to four Saturdays a year. Students, friends, parents and family members of all ages are invited to this event. Together these community members play the game to see who has the greatest knowledge of Central America and can travel down the 'highway' the fastest.

Tracy is a World Regions and U.S. History teacher. Stewart teaches 12<sup>th</sup> Grade English as well as World Regions. They have taught in Korea, Turkey and Saipan. In 1997 the Guam District (DDESS) was formed and the Fosters have taught there since then. Maria Rubio, Guam High School principal says, "They are very conscientious teachers who ensure their students find success."

### Make It Real...continued from page 3

...cook the sandwiches, sell them, and clean up. Some of them have never cooked anything in their lives, but they learn quickly and they work cooperatively to get it all done before classes begin at 7:45.

I believe it works because they become productive citizens, they communicate one-on-one with people from all walks of life with all kinds of needs, they do the right thing, and they see the joy of doing for others.

## Preevyet! G'day Mates! O'la Chow! Hallo! Ahn yong Hah-se-yo! Ni-hau-ma!

By Helen Wall

2001 Alabama DDESS District Teacher of the Year



These are some of the sounds parents will hear at the World's Fair presented at the Fort Rucker Schools toward the end of each year. Along with these international greetings, they savor the smells of foods from many nations and see wonders from around the globe. Thus is the culmination of weeks of becoming aware of the global community in which we live.

For weeks the students research such countries as China, Germany, Australia, Italy, Russia, Brazil and Korea. One study includes the ancient civilization of Egypt.

The students create displays for this museum atmosphere and act as guides as parents wander through the exhibits, examining the life and history of each country. The World's Fair Project is a multi-sensory, cross-curriculum, grade-level composite of learning.

All areas of the curriculum are infused in the study of each country. Some countries' studies are more oriented toward science or the arts, while others lean toward history and culture. Parents are likely to see a pagoda in the China exhibit and "onion" domes in the Russian exhibit. The results of Internet research are evident in findings of the Middle Ages in Germany or the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. Egyptian art reflects that lost civilization. Chinese characters used to spell numbers show an appreciation for alternative communication systems while Italian pasta math projects add interest to solving everyday math problems.

Parents are involved in many of the at-home projects. The castles and pyramids they help build are among the best in the world. The parents, many of whom are world travelers themselves, contribute any information they may have collected. The highlight of this study is the parents' visit to the World's Fair. Parents spending an afternoon with their children as museum guides make lasting impressions. This experience directly connects the home and the school as a celebration of learning.

One will find the World's Fair in the first grade pods at Fort Rucker Primary Schools. Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if all teaching and learning could take place in such high-interest ways?

## Operation Opera Why the Fat Lady Sings

By Kathy Bearden

Fort Campbell DDESS Teacher of the Year



**W**hen the lights dim, a hush falls over the audience. A single spotlight focuses on the production manager who welcomes everyone to the South American rainforest. An empty stage has been magically transformed into a jungle of vines and greenery.

For the next forty-five minutes, the audience will be transported to the Amazon. All

this comes to the audience courtesy of the fourth grade classes at Lucas Elementary. As teachers continue to constantly search for new, innovative ways to nurture the learning process in students, Fort Campbell has found an inventive and creative way to integrate the classroom curriculum with the arts.

For eight years we have participated in the Metropolitan Opera Guild's "Creating Original Opera" project. First, we must remove our stereotypes of opera. In this project it's not over when the fat lady sings. On the contrary, her singing is just the beginning of a powerful educational tool that enhances both teaching and learning. The project pairs one classroom teacher and one music teacher and teaches them how to lead students in the creation of an original music production. It requires children to use knowledge and concepts from all curriculum area such as social studies, science, physical education, mathematics and language arts to achieve a common goal. Music, art, theatre and dance are all components of the project.

Our school works with approximately 75 fourth graders. Four teachers are involved in this year's production. Work begins the first week of school and will culminate in the musical production at year's end. Students give input about topics that interest them. Some examples have been friendship, child abuse, immigration and the rainforest. After choosing the topic, a theme and thesis statement is defined. Then characters are developed with specific traits and needs. This information allows students to identify each character's motives. The process continues by taking the students through the various stages of the writing process. Children feel a strong sense of ownership and take great pride in the opera because they wrote it.

During the course of writing the opera, each student is given a job. The students form a company which will work together to produce the show. The carpenters use mathematics when designing and building

scale models and sets. The electricians must have a working knowledge of electricity, including amps, watts, conversion and wiring in order to build lights and run the light board. The writers produce dialogue, and the composers write the music. Performers are chosen to deliver the spoken words and the music. Each job is of equal importance and all must work cooperatively for the show to be a success. Because each job is matched to the learning style of the student, there is instant motivation and the end result is always positive. This experience becomes a life long memory for students who will look back on it as the highlight of their elementary experience.

The Metropolitan Education Guild establishes a partnership between itself and the participating school. The principal, classroom teacher, and music teacher apply directly to the Guild. These two teachers attend a ten-day training session at one of three regional locations. A \$145.00 participation fee includes room and board, as well as the opportunity to train with outstanding artists and musicians. This training prepares teachers to return to class ready to use opera as a vehicle to advance interdisciplinary instruction, not only between themselves and the music program in the school, but also among teachers in different grade levels or subject areas. The possibilities for camaraderie among teachers are limitless.

Education today demands that we challenge our students by providing them with curriculum that focus on the creative and collaborative process. It must enhance student self-esteem and develop the reasoning skills necessary for success in a world that changes rapidly each day. The Metropolitan Opera project does all that and more. It is an investment in our students' futures. It is an opportunity for teachers to rejuvenate their enthusiasm and commitment to education. It is the reason the fat lady continues to sing.

For more information on how schools can participate in this project, call the Metropolitan Opera Guild Education Department at (212) 769-7023, or visit the web site at [www.operaed.org](http://www.operaed.org).

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### **Stereotyping Teenagers**, *continued from page 6*

Teachers continually exclaim that our students are nurturing and kind to the children. Participation in these projects offers our teenagers a chance to explore teaching and parenting. The teenagers are also afforded the opportunity to exhibit their talents. I invite high school teachers to plan how they can help their classrooms of teenagers explore working with children on professional levels. I encourage those already incorporating a mentoring program to continue. We can help overturn any negative teenage stereotyping through these activities. We can prepare our teenagers to become good parents, active citizens, and to perhaps become effective teachers.

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## Making a Difference – Thank You, Mrs. Billie T. Chandler



By Hope Matthews

2001 Brussels District Teacher of the Year

**M**ore than 30 years ago at Itazuke AB, Japan, magic came into my life in the form of a DoDDs fifth and sixth grade English teacher, Billie T. Chandler. Mrs. Chandler had the same clear expectations for everyone. I can still hear her high-pitched Texas twang saying, “I don’t care if your daddy is President of the United States, you will do it!” For dauntless fifth and sixth graders, that meant learning English inside and out. While other classes read fun novels and cool poetry, we diagrammed and analyzed complex sentences and learned new vocabulary words. To this day I will never forget that Babe Ruth’s ball is the direct object of the hit – or that a preposition is almost anything a frog can do to a pond! She explained the magic our language holds and the power we are given by using it well.

Mrs. Chandler was “old-fashioned” but her essence is still alive in the classroom today. It didn’t matter to Mrs. Chandler that 11 year olds had “other things to do.” Every night, including Friday, ten new vocabulary words were to be written, spelled correctly and definitions memorized for the next day’s discussion and quiz. If one weren’t meeting her level of expectation, Mrs. Chandler would counsel that student privately (during the recess she was missing!) and help her succeed. I worked hard for her accolades and I was blessed to have parents who made sure that I did what she expected. Classmates with less support at home could expect to find Mrs. Chandler on the other side of their front door for “a little chat with you and your folks.” For Billie T. Chandler, teaching wasn’t just a job. It was a profession, and she was passionate about it.

Mrs. Chandler made a difference because she cared about everyone learning. When a bewildered student didn’t know the answer, she would always say, “The smartest person in the world doesn’t know all the answers, but she knows where to find them. Let’s find it together!” Then she led the search.

In my years in the classroom I hope I have shown my students the compassion she modeled and the guidance she offered. I hope that I have helped to arm them for their future successes, as Mrs. Chandler did for me. I hope that I have mirrored her persistence in declaring that everyone can learn! Although it cannot always be measured, never doubt the influence a teacher holds. Thank you, Mrs. Chandler!



## Stereotyping Teenagers (or Mistaken Identities)

By Janis Wooten

2001 Okinawa District Teacher of the Year

**H**igh school years are a phase in our youth’s lives that introduce many independent changes in their behavior, decision making, and freedoms that were not granted to them as children. These are new-found freedoms that allow them more choices in clothing styles, dating, after-school activities, transportation, and school curriculum. The teenager’s reactions to these changes often project a damaging stereotype that embraces our teenage population and widens the gap between adults and teens. How can we as educators help dispel this image and help our teenagers prepare for the next phase in their lives?

One approach that has proven successful in our district has been for our local high schools to invite elementary school children into our classrooms as proteges of our teens. We plan activities that teach high school students how to mentor our younger youth. We invite eager K-6 children to come to our school for the day or for several class periods. One class of teenagers tutors the children in reading while another teenage class works with them on the proper use of the T183+ calculator. Various high school teachers arrange for their classes to teach children how to create photograms, study a foreign language, build a telescope, play a sport, or learn how to swim.

We celebrate ethnic holidays with themes, making each class responsible for teaching children how to make a piñata, dye eggs, create a craft project, and use story telling as part of the academic work necessary for education. We plan entertainment through a theater project, have cake walks, play musical chairs, have a visit from Santa, a shopping spree at our local school holiday market, and prepare and serve their lunch. These endeavors do not interrupt our regular academic schedule, since different classes prepare their share of activities for the day. The children meet many teenagers each session and have a chance to see what new exciting adventure is going to be presented. We also have students who serve our local schools through the cooperative work experience program. *Story continued on page 5*