

# Northern Plains Hockey Coaching Newsletter

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## **A Day in the Life of a Teacher**

With most youth hockey seasons either wrapped up or close to wrapping up, I thought it was appropriate to write one more newsletter for the year. For those of you who don't know my background, I am a high school mathematics teacher and athletic director at a small high school in North Dakota. My job consists of teaching mathematics the first 4 class periods of the day and then doing athletic director duties the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the day. Also understand that I work in a school district where each grade has 40-60 students. My typical morning consists of a calculus course, two pre-calculus courses, and a general mathematics course.

Yesterday the high school principal came down to my classroom in the morning and asked if I could fill in as the art teacher the last hour of the day. Once in a while substitute teachers are hard to find in a small community- or we already have several working that day- so I end up teaching as a substitute for an hour or two. Our school district has one art teacher who is shared by grades 3-12 in our school system. My substitute job was to teach one 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class for about 40 minutes.

I'm not the most creative person by any stretch- I'd actually be a lot closer to the bottom than the top of a list of creative people. I might even be at the very bottom of the list. One of my former students once told me that a stick figure was just beyond my artistic ability. So when the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students showed up for their art class on Monday afternoon I quickly gave them their instructions as they had been left for me- make a drawing or painting of something related to Spring. Use colored pencils, markers, or the oil or water-color paints to complete the project.

The project seemed simple- even for a bunch of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. As soon as I finished the directions the students were off to grab their supplies from the cupboards and shelves. Wouldn't you know it, on the day I show up every kid wants to paint. I'm a math teacher- we like things organized. So much for that.

For the next 30 minutes I walked around the room and watched the students work. Near the end of the 30 minutes one student called me over to his table. He asked me what I thought of his painting. I looked at it hard for a short period of time- I summoned every ounce of creativity in my body. Finally I gave in- "What is it?" He looked at me as if I was dumb and replied, "It's a baseball diamond." I looked at it again and came up with this critique- "You're missing one base." He looked

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at his drawing and without saying a word moved his finger from one base to the next- he was obviously “running the bases” in his mind and counting them.

After agreeing he looked at me and asked, “What shape is a baseball diamond?” The kid next to him said loudly, “I told you it was a square- just turn the paper a little.” I laughed and told him to give it a try. I moved away from the table and let the kids finish up their projects. Once the students had finished, they cleaned up their space and headed back to their regular classroom.

Before leaving the classroom I walked through an adjoining room where two high school students were working on some independent study art projects. I looked at one of the drawings and said to the student who was working on it, “Wow! Did you trace that?” The young lady looked at me, rolled her eyes and replied, “No. I drew it freehand.” One of those moments where I probably should have said nothing or just gave her a compliment and moved on.

As I walked back to my classroom I thought to myself, “How can a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader and a 12<sup>th</sup> grade have such different ability when it comes to art.” I know that’s a stupid question. We’ve all seen the “I don’t know what it is” art project. Why does a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader make an art project like that? Because they are supposed to- that is where their cognitive and artistic ability is at that point in their life. Honestly most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade art projects in that class had some issues- there were dogs bigger than people, flowers larger than trees, etc. They were like any typical 3<sup>rd</sup> grade art project. The interesting thing is adults are ok with these 3<sup>rd</sup> grade projects. We expect this from 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. There are even parents out there that hang these projects on the refrigerator.

From the perspective of a young hockey player, isn’t this what the ADM is about? The ADM encourages coaches to do the right thing at the right age with their teams. In other words, let 8 year olds be 8 year olds. Coaches should have expectations that are appropriate for 8 year olds. However, coaches should have different expectations and focus on more detail when dealing with 18 year olds. They are able to view things differently and certainly have more advanced cognitive and physical ability.

The young man who created the 3-base diamond plays summer baseball- actually a good little player. He knows how to run the bases in the right order. His problem

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was visualizing a baseball diamond in his mind and trying to translate it to paper. Seems easy to me but not necessarily for an 8 year old. If I was designing an art class for 40 year olds, I would expect them to be able to visualize a baseball diamond and draw it with pretty good accuracy. But the art class I was teaching was for 8 year olds so the expectation was different. Maybe the most important part of the class was having a little fun while the students were creating their projects.

Luckily we have parent-teacher conferences this week. I fully intend to track down the parents of this 8 year old and recommend the following:

1. Their son needs to move up to the next grade- he's not currently being challenged.
2. Their son needs to be in a year-round art program. Maybe we can find a summer AAA art program
3. Finally- this isn't about having fun. Their son needs to start doing the same things the 18 year old was working on- precise drawings with lots of detail- skip the skill work and move on to the masterpiece.

I hope everyone enjoys the off-season. By the way, there should be an off-season! When the season starts up again next Fall we really need to focus on what is right for the age-level each of us is coaching. There is no substitute for age-appropriate training and age-appropriate expectations. And remember FUN always has to be part of what we are doing!

## **Contact Information**

Feel free to contact me if you have any thoughts, questions, or ideas. I would be more than happy to come to your association and visit about any hockey-related topic.

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