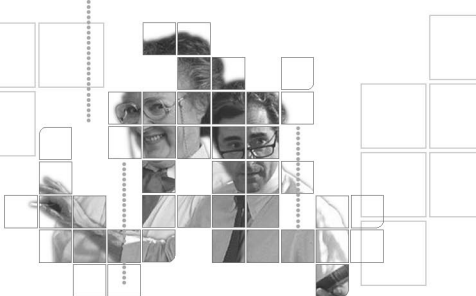


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Relational Learning

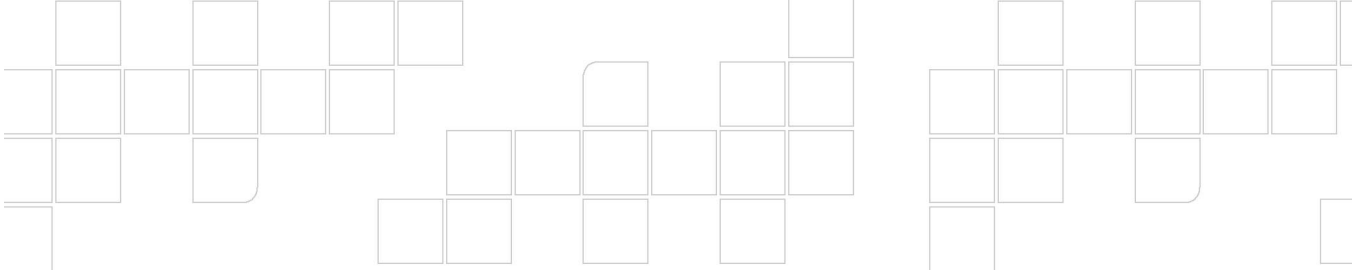


What We Know

One of the challenges that I face most often as a public school teacher is finding techniques that encourage and create meaningful learning for my students. This is a daunting task because I am a history teacher, which continually is ranked as the least favourite subject by students. My goal was to find material and techniques that would enliven my curriculum. It was not easy taking a subject area that usually is narrowed down to the simple story of dates and names and transforming it into something that lives and breathes. My search did lead me to discover and develop a way to use student notebooks to create a means by which my students obtained a meaningful learning experience in the classroom.

Yes, I did say student notebooks. I realise that most student notebooks are dull collections of information filled with lists of dates, names and poorly understood, unconnected ideas. Usually, students take notes when required to do so – usually passively copying what the teacher says or writes – and then regurgitate that information during a test. There is little retention of information and students are not required to identify key concepts nor are they encouraged to actively and creatively respond to new information. Their relationship to the content is nowhere near what it could be.

I was lucky enough to find an alternative to the lifeless notebook mentioned above. Because the student's relationship to the subject is what really matters, we are calling these student notebooks RelationalLearning notebooks. They stem from an idea presented to me at a teacher's conference one summer. Over the years, I have modified the notebooks, and they have become an integral part of my curriculum and are key to helping enhance the



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RelationaLearning Notebooks: An Introduction

RelationaLearning notebooks are designed to engage the student in the curriculum and allow them to become more creative, independent thinkers and writers. It is important to note here that RelationaLearning notebooks can be used as a tool in any subject taught in schools. In these notebooks, students take class and reading notes on the right side of the notebook. On the left side, they are encouraged to process the ideas that they encounter in a variety of ways – through diagrams, webs, poems, charts, personal responses and the like. The purpose of the notebook is to enable learners to make a personal connection

with the material. When students are motivated because the task at hand is interesting and they are allowed to be investigative and creative, the learning will be deeper and last longer.



I was amazed at how much more proficient I became at teaching the various elements of the RelationaLearning notebooks each year that they were introduced to my classes. I was constantly refining the techniques and adjusting them to fit the course or the group of young people who I was teamed up with. Please feel free to do the same for your particular circumstances.

Lisa



According to the RelationaLearning approach (Otero et al. 2000), schools and teachers traditionally overemphasise the memorisation of facts in the relationship between student and subject. In contrast, the RelationaLearning notebooks fully use the RelationaLearning approach and nudge the students outside this comfort zone. The notebooks require students to be active participants in their learning, thus developing

more fully their relationship with the content being studied. In order for students to make connections with the material, they must take their relationship with the subject further. They must engage in a relationship with the 'outside', with others and with themselves by seeking meaningful connections.

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RelationalLearning

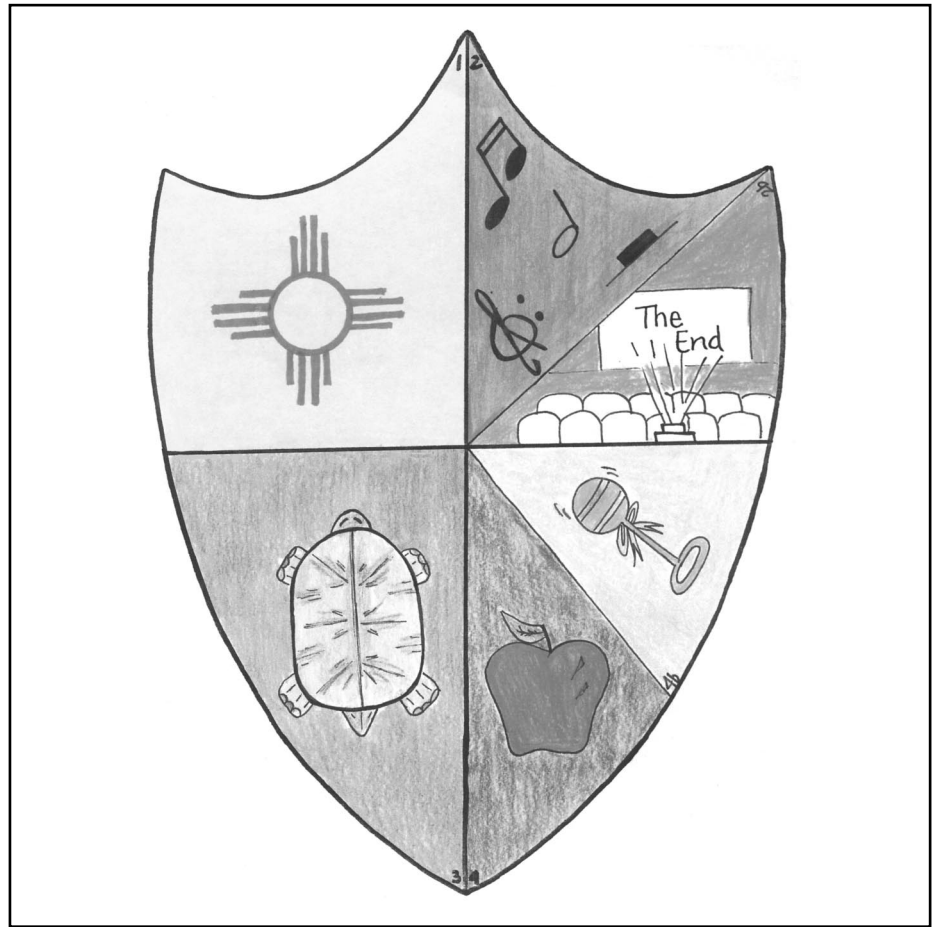


Figure 2 This personal shield was completed and attached to a RelationalLearning notebook.

Title Pages

As the class begins to study a new unit students create a title page on the right side of the notebook. This title page should include the title of the unit and illustrations or pictures that focus on the major themes and concepts under study. Ideally, this activity is assigned following a brief introduction to the unit that is accompanied with a brainstorming session in which students list what they know and what they want to know about the new unit. This is the students' opportunity to initially relate to the material.