

Capturing **KIDS** *Hearts*

As students filed into her classroom at the start of each school day, fifth-grade teacher Susan Jones used to be seated at her desk, correcting tests or organizing work for the day. Now she's always at the door, extending a hand and a greeting to each of her students individually.

The Richards School teacher made the change after attending a "Capturing Kids' Hearts" seminar in the summer of 2003.

"I used to be sending the message to the kids that paperwork was more important than they were," Jones said. "They were essentially starting the day alone. Now I'm at the door and they walk up to me with their hands already out."

It's a small change, but taken together, the routines in the "Capturing Kids' Hearts" program result in big changes in classroom culture, according to teachers and administrators in Whitefish Bay.

Richards principal Elaine Gehring

first heard about the program from an educator friend in Elm Grove. Gehring went to a training session at the Texas headquarters of the Flippen Group, which developed "Capturing Kids' Hearts."

Hearts and Minds

"The core of the program is, if you reach a child's heart, you reach his mind," says Gehring. "For all of us, what a difference relationships make in our learning."

The Flippen Group is a corporate consultant and motivator that offers "Capturing Kids' Hearts" training to educators around the country.

After Gehring shared the framework of the program with staff members, six attended training in the Milwaukee area and returned with rave reviews. Since the summer of 2003, 25 teachers from Richards, 12 from Cumberland, 19 from Whitefish Bay Middle School and nine from the high school have completed "Capturing Kids' Hearts" training in Milwaukee, Chicago and other locations. The Whitefish Bay

Education Foundation helped fund much of the training with a grant.

Cumberland principal Jayne Heffron says some of her teachers call "Capturing Kids' Hearts" a life-changing experience.

"I've been in education a long time and have attended lots of things that are supposed to have an impact," says Heffron. "This was a very moving experience. It reminds people of the impact they can have on kids' lives and re-ignites that fire. We're all here because of kids but teaching is a hard and demanding job with ever-increasing pressures. This really re-focuses teachers, from brand-new to quite experienced."

Social Contract Sets Tone

The "social contract" you may have noticed in classrooms is a product of "Capturing Kids' Hearts." The students and teachers write the contracts together. They discuss priorities and decide how they should treat each other. Teachers say the contract prevents discipline from

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becoming personal when students behave inappropriately. The teacher can point to the contract and redirect the student with the program's "big four" questions: What are you doing? What should you be doing? Were you doing it? What are you going to do about it? In this way, the teacher's response to misbehavior is uniform and fair.

Pam Ryder, Director of Personnel and Pupil Services for Whitefish Bay Schools, wrote the grant proposal to the Whitefish Bay Education Foundation. "We feel that it's so important to look at the total learner, the total child. This is a means, not the only vehicle, for looking at how to involve the learner in the classroom and the environment."

Another tenet of "Capturing Kids' Hearts" is time for sharing "good news." Teacher Susan Jones says it doesn't take long for each of her fifth-graders to tell something positive about their day or, something lousy. "Many of us need to reframe and say, 'This is O.K.,' says Jones. "The kids eat it up. They have stories to share, and their hands shoot up. We need to give them time to do it. At the same time we work on the main idea, also modeling good writing, eye contact and hand shaking." Richards principal Elaine Gehring says the basics of "Capturing Kids' Hearts" work well even in the most challenging class-

room situations.

"We had a class last year that had particularly needy kids, highly prone to acting out," Gehring says. "In any class if that's not managed well it would impact the whole group. The teacher used 'Capturing Kids' Hearts' strategies and used respect as an important part. The whole class saw that even if one child makes mistakes, he's still an important part of the group and has something to contribute. It was a great year."

If you go to the "Capturing Kids' Hearts" website, you might think you've entered a land of corporate-speak, not educational innovation. The site is peppered with phrases like, "dynamic three-day training," and "develop relationships and processes that bring out the best in people." But talk with teachers and administrators in Whitefish Bay who've completed the program, and you'll hear genuine praise.

Gehring says she attends as many "Capturing Kids' Hearts" training sessions as she can because she learns more every time. One of the principles reads, "Emotional Intelligence can be taught and has a significant role in supporting student learning as well as preparing our students for the future." Gehring says, "It brings to the surface for us as adults how important relationships and connections are."

A teen leadership model of "Capturing Kids' Hearts" for students will start up at the middle school next year, and more teachers across the district are scheduled to attend training in coming months

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"Capturing Kids' Hearts"

Advocates for Education Forum

**Tuesday, January 25th, 2005
7 p.m.**

WFB High School, Room 47

Learn How Teachers and Administrators in Whitefish Bay are Capturing Students' Hearts and Minds

Teachers say a new training program is changing their approach to classroom relationships. Come find out how the program is working in your child's elementary, middle or high school classroom.