

2008 UF COE Writing Contest Entry

(This is one of 27 entries submitted in the College's recent writing contest on the topic of "What's Good in Education?". Visit the [Writing Contest home page](#) for links to other entries, including the winner.)

WHAT'S GOOD IN EDUCATION?

Changing obstacles into opportunities

By **KATHY CHRISTENSEN**

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High stakes tests, scripted programs, budget cuts, increasing number of students living in poverty: these are some of the obstacles teachers face today. Add to that public criticism and lack of parental involvement, and one would think educators do not have a fighting chance. While those very real problems cast a cloud of pessimism and cynicism over schools throughout the Sunshine State, I am happy to report that there is much that is excellent in education today.

For the past 25 years, I have been a classroom teacher and/or reading coach in a public school in Florida. I have experienced many mandates and changes over those years. As a teacher leader I feel I am in a unique position to report on the good news related to our schools and students. First and foremost, most students come to school eager to learn and foster the positive community culture of their schools. For many students, schools are a haven from the problems of home. For others it is the opportunity to be the first in their family to become literate in English and graduate from high school. For most students, school provides the opportunity to build relationships locally and globally through cooperative projects and experiential learning. Students are something that is right in education today.

For the last three years I have been a student at UF, working on my specialist degree in Curriculum and Teacher Leadership. My professors have been excellent; the courses rigorous and relevant, and my colleagues truly inspirational. The positive effects of cohort work are seen throughout our school and community. Our studies have directly influenced our instruction, all centered on the social, emotional and academic improvement of our students. I have seen, first hand, how differentiation, inquiry and data-driven instruction have led to quality units of study, dialogue centered on student work, and the creation of a culture of learning for all.

Additionally, as a teacher leader who provides professional development for our staff, I have worked side by side with new teachers. Their expertise in classroom

management, reading instruction and planning is better than ever. Teachers strive to meet the needs of their students, mindful that "fair" does not mean that everyone does the same thing. We are attentive to learning styles, English language levels and brain research on learning. Schools of Education and teachers are clearly something right in education today.

It seems that the general public is of the mindset that they know what schools and teachers need to do, having once attended school themselves. Well, I have been to the dentist, but you truly do not want me to fill your cavities. We must educate the public about the important work we do. We must celebrate our accomplishments.

We must share our skills and expertise so others understand the aptitude and art of teaching. Critical friend groups, professional development led by school leaders, and communities of learners-parents, teachers and students working together can change education's obstacles into opportunities.

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