

# “Why I Teach”

by Tom Shenk  
Region II Teacher of the Year



I was first drawn to the teaching profession for two reasons. First, I love being around children because their innocent, open playfulness is so much fun, and second, it is extremely rewarding to see the smile on a child’s face when I help them understand something that has given them difficulty. I spent fourteen fantastic years as an elementary classroom teacher, and then became eager for a new challenge. I decided to combine my love of teaching with my love of physical activity, so I transitioned to elementary Physical Education, and it has been great!

What keeps me enthusiastic about teaching after 20 years is the opportunity to positively impact lives. School is a defining experience for most people, so I want to help point students in the right direction. At the heart of my teaching philosophy is the belief that we should develop not just good students, but good people who are happy, healthy, and who enrich the lives of those around them. Children aren’t just “brains” that need filling, but human beings who need guidance in all areas of life—mental, physical, emotional, and social. We should nurture the whole child.

As a PE teacher, I’ve learned about the fundamental connection between movement and learning, which has led me to discover a whole host of brain-based research that suggests ways we could be making learning more brain friendly. Not only can we improve our teaching strategies, but I now believe that there are many things we can do to fundamentally change the brains of our students, improving their creativity, curiosity, focus, and learning ability. As a result, I am entering a new phase of my educational experience—the research phase. I have co-written a grant which will allow us to pilot a program of increased movement and

other brain-based teaching techniques in a second grade class of struggling readers. Our goal is to see which methods are successful, and then expand them within our school and beyond.

So now I want to reach a whole new educational audience—parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, teacher trainers, university officials, and politicians. I feel compelled to share brain-based educational methods with those who can help implement reform.

This is why I teach!

