

January 1, 2024

Special points of interest:

- Who can slam a revolving door?
- Why are dwarf conifers so @#%\$^^&*& expensive?
- How many rocks are needed for a true rock garden?
- What is the biggest problem whenever a group of teachers get together to rewrite a schools standards of learning?

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Bob's News & Musings

Landscaping With Miniature/Dwarf Conifers



Everybody has his own definition for miniature conifers, dwarf conifers, and semi-dwarf conifers. So rather than merely throw these terms around or adopt someone else's random definition, I will define these terms as I use them. Do not assume these definitions will be the same everywhere.

For this article, I consider a miniature conifer to be a conifer that will measure less than 18 inches (50 cm) in any one direction after ten years of **average** growth. A dwarf conifer will measure less than three feet (one meter) in any one direction after ten years of average growth. Under optimum conditions, a conifer may grow faster than is expected so I am considering averages when I classify conifers according to these measurements for this article. The American Conifer Society uses growth rates for these two groups (Miniature (< 1" per year), Dwarf (1" - < 6" per year) .

I am using sizes rather than growth rates for an easier visualization of the plant when grown in a landscaped setting.

Miniature conifers are very hard to find in garden centers and are almost impossible to find in chain stores. There is a 'good' reason for this. Most people associate price with size and want to get a large plant for their money. Thus faster growing plants are the ones most readily available.

When the bargain conscious consumer purchases such a plant and treats it as if it were not going to grow much more than it already has, he makes a costly mistake. He now has a plant with a short useful life span.

A slow-growing conifer has the potential for a very long useful life in any landscape. Such a plant must be grown several years in the wholesale plant nursery in order to attain a saleable size. The extra years of care require a higher selling price, but remember the old adage "You get what you pay for."

I have always been fascinated with these conifers. They are true freaks of nature that have almost no chance of survival without human intervention. When they appear in the wild as

seedlings, they are quickly strangled by any larger plants growing near them. Any witch's-brooms that develop have short life spans since they are rapidly shaded by normally growing branches higher in the tree. However, when used in a landscape, miniatures and dwarfs have a longer life expectancy than most of their companion plants, provided the companion plants are not allowed to overgrow them.

I have seen many different forms of these conifers. Some grow into tight little cushions while others become miniature trees. Little globes are common, while many are even shaped like Hershey's Kisses, and some are tight little spires. No matter what the final shape, these plants add variety to the landscape and require very little maintenance.

Miniature and dwarf conifers are perfect for narrow borders, foundation plantings, rock gardens, garden railroads, and as a complements to heather or dwarf perennial gardens. These conifers are often



Above: *Abies*
concolor

‘Pigglemee’

Below: *Abies*
koreana ‘Kohout’s
Icebreaker’



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used to create dwarf conifer gardens with a few accent plants and a scattering of rocks. No matter how miniature conifers are used in the landscape, they will not outgrow their location and seldom need replacement.

The first step in using miniature and dwarf conifers in a landscape is to decide where they may be most effective. Obviously they cannot be used as individual specimens or among any plants that become large and/or bushy. Also since they will usually be more costly than other conifers, they should be planted where they can be enjoyed on a daily basis. Since they are small, a raised bed will bring them closer to eye level where they may be more readily appreciated.

A raised bed may be created in a number of ways. The simplest raised bed is made with topsoil positioned so that it appears natural. It is nicest if it can be developed at the base of a slope, where the topsoil can be graded to appear like a flat, raised projection of the slope itself. The slope can be very slight or more pronounced and still serve nicely to tie the raised bed into the landscape. Walls of native stone can be utilized along portions of the raised areas to allow the visitor closer viewing of the plants by providing definite boundaries and still keep the natural appearance.

If a slope is not avail-

able, then several tapered mounds that give the impression of natural hummocks can prevent an artificial appearance. They need not be large and can be suited for any size garden. Merely construct them to scale. There are many areas in the world where the ground is naturally rolling. Since these artificial hummocks are to be planted with dwarf conifers, even the small garden will have a natural appearance.

In the more formal garden, a raised bed can be created with cottage stones, cut stones, bricks, or treated timbers. Sometimes this raised bed will stand alone while other times it may be built along a raised patio or a high house foundation. It might also be built around the border of the ground-level patio to provide a walled border between the patio and the lawn area. If an alpine house is part of the garden, a raised bed might be constructed around it to provide extra thickness to the masonry walls so the house need not be built like a pit house. The height of the raised bed will be determined by its other possible functions. It might be knee high when it stands alone while around the patio or the alpine house it could be waist high.

A raised bed can also be constructed by terracing one or more parts of a steep slope. Each terrace needs a wall at the base to retain the

soil. The wall may be of any height from one foot to more than three feet (ten centimeters to one meter), depending upon the steepness of the slope.

A walkway along a raised bed should always reflect the nature of the raised bed. The raised areas that are intended to be informal may have walkways of grass, gravel, or bark while the formal raised beds will tend to have walkways of flagstone, gravel, or concrete.

Miniature and dwarf conifers also work nicely as part of a border garden around a lawn. When conifers are mixed with heather and rhododendrons, an interesting variety of colors and textures results. I like to use dwarf and slow growing rhododendrons, especially species selections with interesting foliage. The hybrids tend to be a bit too gaudy for my taste. Besides, they are selected for flower color rather than foliage attributes and are not all that interesting nine months out of the year.

By blending heather throughout the border, the conifers are mixed with flowering plants that do not overpower the conifers while providing additional color throughout the year. Using both *Erica* and *Calluna* will provide flowers through the summer and winter in milder climates. When they are not blooming, the foliage can continue to provide

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color interest. Meanwhile, the conifers give a feeling of permanence while toning down the variety of bright colors creating an overall pleasing landscape scene.

A few perennials among the heather, rhododendrons, and conifers would not necessarily be out of place. They should not be large growing selections so they do not become the focal points. The whole idea is to create a planting scheme that blends everything without focusing on any particular plant or plant species. Dwarf perennials mixed among the plants will add diversity and variety to the garden. If the flowers are not too gaudy, they will complement the flowers on the heather plantings as well.

The idea of the border planting can be extended to include the foundation of the house. Most houses are constructed with a concrete foundation showing between the soil line and the material that forms the house's outer walls. The foundation is unsightly if not properly treated in the overall landscape plan. The idea is not to completely hide the foundation, but rather to soften and blend it so that it becomes a gradual transition zone between the house and the soil. Miniature and dwarf conifers are a very important part of this planting. They will never grow into the house nor affect the foundation of the house with their roots. They

should be used to complement the faster growing conifers and broad-leaved plants that are also part of this design.

Miniature conifers can be used to create small mounds in the foundation planting. They can also be used where miniature spires or naturally dwarf trees are wanted as part of the scheme.

When the border is around a patio or pool, it has to be developed with the idea that it will be viewed from all sides, unlike the foundation planting which has one side toward the house. Miniature conifers will add a permanent aspect to the border that will not outgrow its location nor block the views in either direction. Generally the plants towards the ends and centers of the borders should be tall with those near the ends being the taller. Other plants need to be lower, providing an overall "W" outline. This scheme also works well for the foundation planting along a house with the more upright plants being located between windows and/or doors.

Miniature and dwarf conifers also work exceptionally well in a planting along the top of a low retaining wall. They do not overpower the wall and are nicely viewed by anyone walking along the wall itself. These conifers need some elevation to bring them closer to eye level for their full

appreciation. If the wall is constructed of cottage stones or fieldstones, the conifers can be placed more randomly. The cultivars selected can easily be the ones without formal outlines. If the stones are set in mortar or if the wall is built of brick, a more formal plan needs to be followed. These conifers should have more regular outlines. If a weeping plant is used above a wall, it can be quite attractive when allowed to grow down the face of the wall. The mound it creates above the wall will break up the straight lines of the wall itself and create a different appearance than a prostrate conifer, which would hug the wall much more tightly.

Usually the wall is part of a system for terracing a slope. In the more formal setting, the landscaped portion may only be a narrow band along the top of the wall while the informal setting will often see the slope continued up from the wall and completely incorporated into the garden. No matter which type of landscape is being developed, miniature conifers play an important part.

Slopes erode and must be planted accordingly. Walls will help prevent erosion but are not always feasible, nor always desired. Covering a slope with a ground cover can prevent erosion but can be unexciting. Turning the slope into a garden is much more interesting. The



Above: *Pinus mugo* 'Mitsch Mini'

Below: *Pinus sylvestris* 'Pixie'





Above: *Abies*
koreana 'Cis'

Below: *Abies*
lasiocarpa
'Lopalpun'



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size of the slope will determine the type of garden. Most often a variation of a rock garden works best on a slope. The rocks not only provide interest, but they also help anchor the soil.

Mention the term "rock garden" to someone and a picture will invariably pop into his head. That picture may be anything from a pile of rocks with a few plants to a scattering of rocks with many plants. Actually a rock garden is a mixture of plants and rocks arranged in such a way as to please the owner and allow the plants to do well.

The rocks utilized in a rock garden need not be native to the gardener's locale but should be the kinds that are found together in nature. Do not intermingle native rock such as granite or basalt with limestone. If different kinds of rocks are used, they should be used in different areas of the garden. Once rocks have been chosen, placement can begin.

There are no great secrets to the placing of rocks in a rock garden. Merely follow nature. Good pictures of mountain scenery will show the rock structures and give many ideas. Flat rocks naturally appear in layers while glacial rocks are a diverse mixture of many different sizes. Flat rocks can be used in horizontal layers or tilted into vertical, layered structures while round rocks in a wide range of sizes and compositions

may be scattered throughout the gardens. Do not use flat rocks and round rocks in the same garden, unless the round rocks are used as part of a streambed, either dry or with flowing water.

Rocks should not sit on the surface of the ground. Large individual rocks need to be two-thirds buried as to give the impression of being part of a formation. Have all of the long axes of the rocks aligned in the same direction or in a sweeping curve. The quantity of rock is up to the gardener. I have seen rock gardens that were 90% rock and others that were only 10% rock.

Rock garden soil needs to be very well drained and not rich in humus. Poorer soils mimic the alpine soils of the mountains and will naturally stunt the growth of conifers keeping them even more dwarf than normal without affecting their health. In my own rock garden, the conifers are healthy in color and appearance while growing at about three-fourths their normal rate due to being planted in glacial subsoil. Since many conifers thrive in organically poor alpine soils throughout the world, such a growth rate is not unexpected.

Careful selection and placement of dwarf and miniature conifers in any rock garden will create a feeling of age and permanence. There are a number of ways to site conifers in a typical rock garden that will

work in both a newly constructed rock garden and the established rock garden. These plants need to be carefully positioned since in most cases they will outlive the other plants in the garden. Unlike the species, dwarf and miniature cultivars will not outgrow their sites and take over a garden.

Small, upright conifers can be used in a wide range of settings throughout a rock garden. These upright plants add variety to a landscape that could easily be very uninteresting throughout much of the year. Large rocks make excellent backdrops for the dwarf, upright plants. Upright plants will soften the border between the rock and the garden and balance the height of the rock(s) behind it. As long as the plant is miniature, it will always accent the rocks rather than hide them. Miniature, upright conifers will also add variety to an area of low alpine plants. Miniatures offer colors and textures that differ from the alpenes and have year round foliage. They will not overgrow the alpenes and will stay in scale with the garden.

Alpine meadows will often have a scattering of stunted upright plants as well as plants that have developed into tight, stunted little mounds, usually due to a combination of climate and grazing by herbivores.

In the rock garden, these little mounds can be duplicated without the need

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to import an animal to do the grazing. There are many dwarf plants that never develop any strong shoots and become cushions and buns. These plants may be scattered through the open areas of the rock garden as a complement to the rocks. Their rounded shapes will either mimic round rocks in a garden or add a different aspect to the garden that has all angular rocks and needs a little softening.

Even a small stream will appear larger if miniature conifers are used. The impression is even greater if a garden railroad is part of the landscape. Miniature conifers

are a must for the owner of a garden railroad because they provide the right scale.

Miniature conifers are also perfect for container gardens. A container garden is essentially a miniaturized landscape in a trough, pot, barrel, or other artificially constructed container. While other conifers will outgrow their site, the miniatures will stay in scale and allow the artificial landscape to function for many years.

Miniature conifers do need some special considerations when they are placed into a landscape. First, miniature conifers need to be

used in a landscape or as part of a landscape that does not overpower them. Second, they are best displayed in a raised planting for close viewing and protection from physical damage by large or small feet. Third, they need protection from wildlife for many years due to their small size. Fourth, they must have good air circulation to prevent the spread of disease in their typically dense foliage.



Miniature conifers and dwarf conifers work together nicely in a garden. Everything will remain in scale for many years. When water and stones are added to the scene, the resulting composition is very pleasing to the eye. The golden conifers here have a healthy color and are not so bright as to make the scene appear artificial. There are many shades of green and some blues as well as a nice variety of shapes and textures. A few red flowers complete the overall picture.

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Picea orientalis 'Tom Thumb Gold' was discovered as a witches'-broom on a specimen of *Picea orientalis* 'Skylands' growing in a front yard in northern New Jersey. It is a miniature bun with bright gold foliage that works well in a variety of landscape settings. Here it is shown with a dwarf *Dianthus* near a number of small boulders along a walkway.



A flowing stream in a bed lined with rocks provides a very natural setting for conifers. All of these conifers provide a variety of colors and textures that contrast nicely with the light colored rocks of the stream bed.

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Many miniature conifers are planted among an assortment of compact conifers and an impressive specimen of *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca Pendula'. The miniature cushions and small cones give color and texture to a garden that needs surprisingly minimal maintenance due to the careful selection of plant material. This small, private garden has border areas around the central lawn as well as a rock garden with flowing water that adjoins a water feature.



A brick walkway and steps tend to generate a feeling of formality in the garden. However, in this instance they provide an opportunity to create a nice little setting where a naturalized retaining wall of round stones interplanted with alpines and topped with the informal shape of the miniature Atlas cedar, *Cedrus atlantica* 'St. Catherine' becomes a garden focal point.

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Garden railroads are becoming very popular throughout the world. This railroad in a Dutch garden uses extensive plantings of miniature conifers to create a scale setting with great variety of colors and textures without diminishing the effect of the train itself.



A grouping of *Picea glauca* 'Pixie' with a carpet of wooley thyme provides a focal point of interest for any garden. They have been planted in a group among moderately sized, flat rocks, giving the overall scene the atmosphere of an alpine setting. The grasses, hydrangea, and conifers in the background provide a nice contrast as well as a feeling of isolation.

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This garden walkway has two different borders. The border to the left is heavily planted with miniature and dwarf conifers providing a definite barrier of many colors and textures while the border to the right is a type of linear rock garden with a wide range of miniature alpine plants and a light scattering of miniature conifers. The overall effect is almost that of a boundary between a coniferous forest and the higher alpine regions just above it.



A church yard scene can be created in miniature when a scale model of a church is combined with miniature conifers providing the effects of large shrubs and trees.

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These three plants form a nice grouping at the edge of a rockery with other miniature and dwarf spruces in the background. When odd numbers of plants are used in groupings, the effect is more natural. Formal plantings tend to work with even numbers of plants. In this instance, the shape and texture of the pine add variety to the grouping while its dwarfness will permit it to remain in this location for many years.



Miniature conifers can add interest to what otherwise might just be a dull, utility area at the corner of a garage. Rocks scattered among the plants and a low, broadleaved ground cover provide contrast.

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Miniature conifers and dwarf conifers work together nicely in a garden. Everything will remain in scale for many years. When water and stones are added to the scene, the resulting composition is very pleasing to the eye. The golden conifers here have a healthy color and are not so bright as to make the scene appear artificial. There are many shades of green and some blues as well as a nice variety of shapes and textures. A few red flowers complete the overall picture.



In this instance, a few miniature conifers are used among an assortment of hebes, cotoneasters, alpines, and dwarf, broadleaved shrubs in a very dry setting. Since most conifers appreciate good drainage and can tolerate long dry spells when established, they work nicely in this kind of setting.

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Pinus banksiana 'Chippewa' is a miniature conifer with an irregular outline that works nicely in a narrow space between a walk and the foundation of a house. Here it is used with several different sempervivens and sedums among a few stones of assorted sizes.



This scene could have been photographed in a part of the Alps, but it wasn't. Here a number of miniature pines have been used among rocks to represent a very natural, sub alpine setting. Their different shapes, colors, and growth rates provide variety while their similarities help the observer to imagine this as a location far from any formal garden setting.

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Instead of having lawn make the border for an entrance walkway, a mixed planting of miniature conifers and alpine adds interest to the landscape.



The corner of a raised bed provides a perfect setting for a cushion-shaped conifer. In this particular instance a wall of old cobblestones provides shades of gray and gray-brown which work nicely with the blue of the *Abies procera* 'Blaue Hexe'.

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A very old specimen of *Abies balsamea* 'Nana' breaks up the flat surfaces and straight lines of this area of the rock garden at Wisley. Much of this rock garden is constructed terrace-like with miniature and dwarf conifers used to break up the horizontal lines, while prostrate and weeping conifers are used to cascade over several of the low walls.



A rockery in front of a tall cobblestone wall provides a nice setting for an assortment of conifers. Most of the conifers are miniatures that develop into buns and cushions. The taller conifers are dwarf and compact selections. The horizontal junipers to the left side are becoming too large and need trimming or replacement. Otherwise the conifers provide a palette of color and textures that complement the rocks and create an overall pleasing effect in front of what could have been a rather harsh setting.

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A rocky mound with a cascading stream is a perfect setting for miniature conifers. The golden plant in the center is *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Golden Ceramic'. Flowing around it is a hemlock, possibly *Tsuga canadensis* 'Cole's Prostrate' or *Tsuga heterophylla* 'Thorson's Weeping'. Either one is completely prostrate with 'Thorson's Weeping' better able to tolerate full sun and slower growing. The blue foliage to the left is from a large growing conifer named *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca Pendula'.



Clockwise from lower left: *Picea glauca* 'Burning Well', *Picea abies* 'Hasin', *Picea abies* 'Eva', *Pinus banksiana* 'Chippewa', *Abies lasiocarpa* 'Duflon'



Tree of the Month: *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aurea Pendula'

About 1900, a bud mutation on a weeping beech was discovered by J. G. van der Boom, Oudenbosch, Holland, and was introduced as *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aurea Pendula'. It exhibits the typical growth habit of 'Pendula' - a single leader with all of the branches hanging vertically along the main stem. Unfortunately, the bright yellow color results in summer scorching of the leaves unless the tree is planted in partial shade. Too much shade turns the plant green.

I first saw this cultivar when visiting Dick van Hoey Smith at the Trompenburg Arboretum in Holland (pictured below). It is an impressive specimen. I could not wait to get some scion wood and grow it myself. I also produced it for sale through Coenosium Gardens. Morning sun will keep it yellow while not causing the foliage to burn. It is a great addition to any garden. The tree pictured on page 17 is growing at the Longnecker Arboretum in Wisconsin (2013 picture).





Conifer of the Month: Cone Popping *Picea pungens*

Many dwarf and miniature conifers do not produce cones, or if they do, the cones are rather insignificant. Since cones add greatly to the garden appeal of a conifer, finding a dwarf conifer that freely produces cones is a major event. During my 1992 visit to Australia, I found such a conifer at Ferny Creek Nursery near Victoria.

Picea pungens 'Early Cones' grows about 2" (5 cm) per year and becomes a flat topped bush twice as wide as high with cones developing at the ends of the branches, making it an 'Acrocona' variety of *Picea pungens*. The cones are purplish when they first appear in the spring, drying to paper-bag brown as they mature. The gray-blue foliage consists of short, thin needles on slender branchlets. It develops slowly and needs about five years before it assumes an appealing shape. Use it in any size rock garden where a small blue cushion is wanted. Consider the cones a bonus. Found as a seedling by Peter and Joe Versteeg, Ferny Creek Nursery, Victoria, it was introduced in 1992.

Interestingly enough, a similar plant was discovered a few years later in Germany. *Picea pungens* 'Hermann Naue' is almost a "dead ringer" for 'Early Cones' with a few significant differences. From a nurseryman's viewpoint, 'Hermann Naue' is a better choice since it becomes a full bush in a shorter time possibly due to its faster growth rate as a young plant. It is easily identified in the spring by its red cones. I had two different plants revert to normal growth in my own garden so I wonder just how stable this cultivar may be.

Both plants will be difficult to find, but as time passes, their availability will become more widespread.

The third example was found at Fisher Farms in Gaston, Oregon by Terry Menninger who found it in a row of normal trees. *Picea pungens* 'Ruby Teardrops' is a dwarf selection with silvery-blue foliage and bright red cones in the spring. It becomes irregularly globose, partially due to the pruning effect of the terminal cones. It grows up to 4 inches (10 cm) per year. The red color of the cones can last up to four weeks before they turn light brown and eventually disintegrate.

A fourth example is under observation at my new Coenosium Gardens location in Puyallup, Washington. I may have closed my nursery but I am still a conifer collector. In 2015 I found a three-year old seedling of *Picea pungens* growing among a thousand potted understocks with a cone on its leader's tip. It is now in the ground and produces many terminal cones in the spring. They are light red and give a nice contrast to the blue foliage of the dwarf plant. Its provisional name is *Picea pungens* 'Hot Poppers'.

Picea pungens 'Hot Poppers'



***Picea pungens* 'Early Cones'**



An attractive plant with whitish-colored spring cones.



***Picea pungens* 'Hermann Naue'**



An attractive plant with reddish-colored spring cones.

***Picea pungens* 'Ruby Teardrops'**





Another time several boys were making fun of a girl until I asked them if they would talk to their mothers that way.



Stack 'em Deep & Teach 'em Cheap (an excerpt)

Section One: Students

Unit Two: Student Behaviors

Chapter Five Bullying: Not All Schools Are Safe Havens

A teacher must not ignore harassment or bullying of any sort. I knew teachers who refused to monitor hallways when classes were passing. The students also knew those teachers; they took advantage of them since unmonitored areas are havens for these behaviors. The teachers said they could not leave unsupervised classrooms to proctor a hallway.

I proctored a hallway by standing outside my open classroom door, watching both areas. I also had a good rapport with my classes, which allowed me to monitor both areas.

At Keithley Middle School and Eatonville High School, I would lock my room at the end of the class before my daily planning period, giving me a few minutes to walk through the hallways while the students were moving. At that time, I could show up anywhere. I also took short walks during my planning time and used a student lavatory instead of the teachers' restroom. Likewise, I enjoyed eating lunch in the cafeteria and often sat at a table with a group of students. Whenever I had free time, I roamed around the building and out onto the grounds.

Occasionally I broke up a fight or disrupted a passionate lip lock. Sometimes, I walked into a cloud of smoke as stu-

dents disappeared around a corner of a building.

If I encountered bullying, I often put a stop to it by embarrassing the bully. However, I had to be careful about how I did it to prevent resentment or problems when I was not around. For example, once, I laid a guilt trip onto a bully by telling the boy that I was considering revising my opinion of him as someone I could like and trust. Another time several boys were making fun of a girl until I asked them if they would talk to their mothers that way.

Some students can handle bullying. Nathan, one of my ninth-grade students, was successful in my science class and became my teacher's assistant for three years. He maintained my computer network for me. Whenever another student attempted to bully him verbally, Nathan ignored it; he would tell me that the bully had issues and that whatever he said did not matter. Nathan came across as a peaceful sort of guy.

One day I saw he had gotten suspended for fighting. When he returned to school, he told me that verbal bullying was one thing, but touching or throwing something took harassment to a different level. Thus Nathan responded physically, standing up for himself. That was the only time the principal suspended him for fighting. Finally, word got around, and the bullying of Nathan stopped.

Several students verbally bullied a boy in my natural resources class. What triggered the bullies was a situation that

could only occur in a rural school system. It happened in October during my first period in Natural Resources. I noticed some commotion among the students before one boy asked if I had a hose he could take outside. He was disappointed when I said no and that he could only turn the outside faucets on with a key. The students around him were waving and holding their noses. When I gave them a puzzled look, they told me that a nasty smell was coming from the boy.

He was upset over the commotion he was causing. He got up every morning at 5:00 AM and did chores on the family farm before coming to school. That morning, while repairing some fencing around the cow pasture, he had walked through several cow pies (cow poop). The excrement was all over his boots and partway up his pant leg. He had tracked it into my classroom (which, luckily, I did not have carpet) and was quite pungently aromatic (for once, my having a cold was helpful). I sent him to the lavatory, where he managed to get everything off, and then he wiped up the floor when he returned to class.

One of the other boys started to criticize him but shut up fast when I pointed out that getting dirty doing honest work is nothing to be ashamed of, and getting up to do an hour or two of dirty work before school is something to be admired.

Stack 'em Deep & Teach 'em Cheap (an excerpt)

Section Two: Administration

Unit One: District Concerns

Chapter Six Trends in Education: Out with the Old, In with the New

During my years at Eatonville, Wednesdays had a one-hour late start time for students. Teachers were to use this time to complete student-focused work such as curriculum development or training. Due to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act by the national government in 2001, the state of Washington instituted a system of high-stakes testing, Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), with its Educational Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). The state government poured millions of dollars into this educational overhaul with all kinds of pressures placed upon the students and teachers.

Student failures in the state test (WASL) were abundant and not surprising. In response, we had to design a new course for students who failed the science WASL and teach to the test. Those students were then required to keep retaking the test until they either passed it or quit. The politicians quickly realized what an untenable position they were in and postponed the consequences of failure. Instead of enforcing the mandate, they continued to tinker with the test and the supporting curriculum.

We had basic formats

to follow to align our courses to these standards. We spent much time researching what other districts had done in their course designs. When we found something we liked, we copied it and adapted it to meet our district's requirements. When we completed the work, we sent copies to the district office. They placed them into binders that went onto shelves where they collected dust. After a few years, the state changed direction and adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As a result, all the work we had completed had to be revised.

Much work was put into this fumbling around by the state before it was all discarded. The WASL and the EALRs were no longer a part of the educational program mandated by the state. Instead, CCSS and End of Year Exams had become the new mantra from the State's Department of Education.

During my 39 years in the classroom, I saw many different educational programs come and go. They just use different terminology and formatting to mean the same things. Usually, some college professor who never worked in a public school system takes an existing plan and rewrites it with new terminology. Then they write a book with expensive support materials, and a lecture tour soon follows.

For example, the 2013 buzzword at Eatonville High School was the Power Standard. Someone wrote a book taking old teaching concepts, relabeling them, and repackaging them as something new.

Then they went around the country presenting expensive seminars and selling books and videos about this beautiful "new" concept that I used back in the 1970s. Meanwhile, the district spent all kinds of money on training and rewriting the curriculum (copying and relabeling the old curriculum would have served the same purpose). We were not the only district doing this. The sad part was that the book publishers and state standards committees had already spent millions of dollars doing the same for their educational materials.

A well-designed lesson will consistently achieve its goal, and the basic format I learned in college always works. But unfortunately, educators and politicians in Washington State decided to redesign everything using the latest buzzwords. As a result, they repeatedly changed and revised the state's educational requirements at a high financial and emotional cost to the students and teachers.

The biggest problem with redoing standards and testing requirements that arises whenever a group of educators gets together would be the educators themselves. They revert to their innate idealism to design a perfect, comprehensive curriculum suited to meet their ideals, a Pollyanna approach to education. They tend to forget the methods used by their teachers as they attempt to replace the old with the new.



When we completed the work, we sent copies to the district office. They placed them into binders that went onto shelves where they collected dust.

Organization

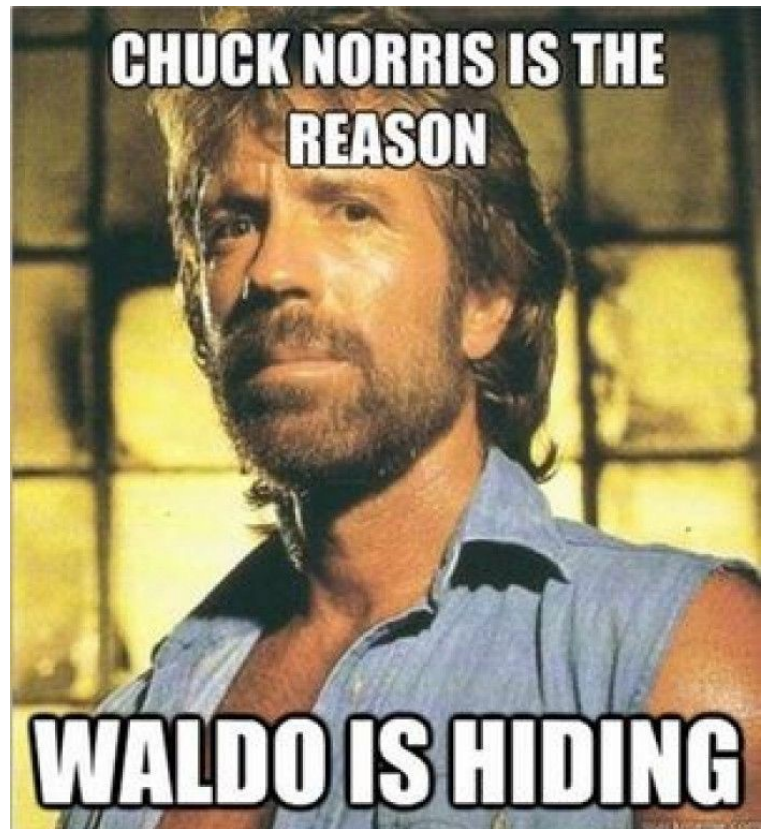
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Chuck Norris can slam a revolving door.
Chuck Norris doesn't flush the toilet, he scares the cr*p out of it.
Chuck Norris can make a fire by rubbing two ice cubes together.
Leading hand sanitizers claim they can kill 99.9% of germs. Chuck Norris can kill 100% of whatever he wants.
Chuck Norris does not get frostbite. Chuck Norris bites frost.
Chuck Norris's tears can cure cancer. He has never cried.
The Great Wall of China was originally created to keep Chuck Norris out. It failed miserably.
Chuck Norris sweats justice.
Chuck Norris has a grizzly bear carpet in his room. It's not dead, it's just afraid to move.
There is no theory of evolution. Just a list of creatures Chuck Norris has allowed to live.
Chuck Norris has been to Mars. That's why there are no signs of life.
When Chuck Norris was born, the only person who cried was the doctor.
Chuck Norris doesn't call the wrong number, you answer the wrong phone.
Chuck Norris doesn't wear a watch, HE decides what time it is.
Fear of spiders is called arachnophobia, fear of tight spaces is called claustrophobia, fear of Chuck Norris is called logic.
Jesus can walk on water, Chuck Norris can swim through land.
There used to be a street named after Chuck Norris, but it was changed because no one crosses Chuck Norris and lives.
There is no such thing as global warming. Chuck Norris was cold, so he turned the sun up.
If, by some paradox in the space/time continuum, Chuck Norris were ever to fight himself, he'd win.
Ghosts sit around the campfire and tell Chuck Norris stories.