B.C. alternate Education Association Newsletter

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Empty Vessels: A New Dimension to Assessing Violence Potential in High-Risk Youth

by J. Kevin Cameron, Program Director, Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Reduction

It is commonly understood that the best predictor of future violence is past violent behaviour. However, there are two problems with the above formula when related to the new wave of high profile violence and threats of violence occurring in American and Canadian schools, such as the tragic school shootings in Littleton, Colorado and Taber, Alberta.

Firstly, the definition of violence is very broad and includes descriptors such as "great force and intensity," "excessive force," "harmful or unlawful use of strength," "roughness or brute force," and many others. Although using an individual's past violent behaviour to predict frequency, intensity, and type of future violence can be useful, many people engage in violent behaviour and yet never come close to becoming murderers.

Secondly, many of the students who have turned guns and knives on their peers had no history of violence prior to becoming murderers. (See "The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative, (2002) United States Secret Service and United States Department of Education).

Following the 1999 school shooting in Taber, Alberta, we were forced to find answers to how "good kids" become murderers. Not just because we experienced it in "our own backyard" but also because we were left dealing with multiple threat-makers in the aftermath of the shootings in Littleton and Taber. An experience that we later learned was common to most school jurisdictions across North America.

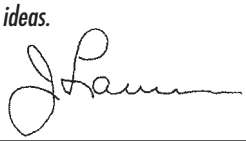
Kevin Cameron gave the Keynote address at the 18th Annual Conference

The concept of "empty vessels" first came into use as we noticed the dramatic lack of connection many of our threat makers and almost all of our school shooters had to healthy mature adults and their lack of clear identity, ...continued on page 3

Inside:

From the Editor's Desk:

Thanks to Rob Purgavie for the many superb BCAEA Newsletters he has produced over the past 2 years. Rob is leaving the Editor's post to dedicate more time to his Masters Degree. We wish him all the best. As the newest Newsletter Editor there's much to learn and many mistakes to be made, but with your understanding and the support of my publishing partner, Mike Shaw, I'm sure we can produce some interesting Newsletters. I am pleased to include an article about a former student who recently updated me on his success. I hope, that when you read the article, you will feel inspired to submit something similar, describing a student success story of your own. I also wish to use our publication to showcase student work, including essays, art or even cartoons. Let your students know how proud you are of the work they produce by having it published. If you have other suggestions/recommendations for things you would like to see in your association's newsletter, please let me know. I am eager to respond to your ideas.



President's Message

Jim Lawson

The annual BCAEA conference was, once again, a resounding success. Many of the nearly 500 attendees applauded the variety of sessions that offered them professional development opportunities and they expressed appreciation for the chance to network with colleagues. 400 registrants used the "new" online registration option. This allowed them to see immediately, what sessions were available and confirmed, right away, the sessions they were in. Many districts appreciated that they could register online, and still pay their registration fee by cheque.

We are very pleased to have been able to open this year's conference with a high energy, very humorous and talented youth theatre group. The students from the Pacific Academy were very entertaining, having a shot at our Premier and showing teachers and students in a humorous light.

The keynote speaker, Kevin Cameron, delivered a very valuable message. Relationships with our kids are critical. You may very well be the significant adult in a particular student's life; you have tremendous power and responsibility. We have an article about Kevin in this issue with contact information for those of you who wish to access his training sessions on "Risk Assessment".

There was a total of 28 morning, afternoon or all-day sessions offered, covering a wide variety of topics and interests. We were advised on how to keep our kids safe and how to keep them connected. The Downtown Eastside Walking Tour exposed us to the harsh realities of life on the streets for some who fall victim to drug abuse, sexual exploitation and poverty. Several sessions presented ideas and strategies on how to enhance our teaching skills and curriculum choices and some Alternate Programs were given the opportunity to showcase what they do best in a sharing session.

For many of us, the highlight of the two-day conference was the Thursday evening Reception; the "social event of the year". This networking opportunity is always one of the most valuable features of the conference (not to mention a great kick-off activity before a night at the Yale). With planning, preparation and direction from Joyce May, the students from Mission Central Elementary and the students and staff from ACE in Abbotsford served up a stellar array of appetizers and beverages. Robbie McPurgavie made his annual appearance to collect donations for the kids involved. Thanks so much for your generosity.

Clearly, the BCAEA Challenge and Change conference has something for everyone. Your continued support has allowed the BCAEA executive to offer this exceptional event every year. If you were there, thanks for coming: we are confident you enjoyed yourself and found the sessions valuable. If you missed it, we hope to see you there next year!

Empty Vessels...

(continued from page 1)

place, and purpose. Their parental and other adult relationships were often marked by extremes on a continuum from neglect to over-involvement. Some experiencing both extremes at different times and others experiencing predominately one or the other. In 1999 the FBI released a monograph titled "The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective". In it they introduce a four-pronged assessment model that includes:

1) personality of the student;
2) school dynamics;
3) family dynamics, and
4) social dynamics.

In conducting threat assessments we are now interested in how much our threat makers are influenced by these dynamics in what we refer to as "contextual assessments" (i.e. what factors outside the individual may be contributing to elevating violence potential?). One of these dynamics, family patterns and relationships, seem to contribute to what some family therapists refer to as "other-validated" individuals: individuals highly influenced by context.

A recognized pioneer in the family therapy movement, Dr. Murray Bowen and his colleague Dr. Michael Kerr in "Family Evaluation" (1988) described the other-validated person this way:

> *People at this level are so immersed in a feeling world that they are mostly unaware of an alternative. Major life decisions are based on what feels right. They are so responsive to others' opinions and to what others want them to do that their functioning is almost totally governed by their emotional reactions to the environment. Responses can range from automatic compliance to extreme oppositional behaviour. The "self" is so poorly developed that use of the pronoun "I" is confined to narcissistic pronouncements such as "I want, I hurt, I want my rights"…. The lack of self is usually manifested in being complete emotional appendages of the relationship systems to which they are attached. They reflexively adapt to alleviate others' discomforts. On the other hand, very poorly differentiated people, if stressed sufficiently, may murderously strike out at others, particularly at those on whom they are most dependent.*
> *(pg. 101)*

Empty vessels appear to be highly other-validated and this has become one of many concepts used in the search to understand how some children can strike out with such generalized homicidal intent. If the empty vessel is currently exposed to healthy human connections he or she can be stabilized but if connections are not healthy neither is the empty vessel.

Two related concepts come into play when assessing threat makers. The first is referred to as the "primary emotional system". In a high-risk students life, the primary emotional system is the human system influencing them the most. The term "human system" refers to the intense emotional dynamics generated by human structures such as family systems, peer group systems and school systems. Therefore, the primary emotional system is whatever human system is contributing most to the threat makers' symptom development. In assessing these systems we sometimes see family dynamics playing the largest role in moving a student towards more violent thinking and behaving and at other times it appears to be peer dynamics or broader school dynamics.

A second related concept is the "secondary emotional system" which is important to the threat makers functioning but secondary in emotional influence. The family system is always either the primary or secondary emotional system with peer, school, and other systems vying for the remaining emotional system of influence.

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"Very poorly differentiated people, if stressed sufficiently, may murderously strike out at others"

18th Annual Challenge and Change Conference

The publisher's display area is always interesting.

Kevin Cameron's Thursday afternoon session was popular.

We networked..

We networked some more...

We got thirsty.

We schmoozed...

Sessions were well attended.

The Reception requires a mountain of work behind the scenes.

We networked a lot...

We got hungry, and Joyce and her crew made us happy.

We got thirsty again...

The Registration Desk quietened down Friday afternoon.

Building Learning Stuctures Inside the Head

Ruby K. Payne, *Ph.D., Founder and President of aha! Process Inc.*

> *"These strategies are analogous to the infrastructure of a house"*

Teaching is outside the head; learning is inside the head. Every individual has a brain but not everyone has a developed mind. The work of Feuerstein, an Israeli educator who successfully worked for nearly 50 years with students whose mental development was delayed, developed mental prowess through a process of mediation. Mediation involves three things: pointing out the stimuli (what the indi-vidual is to give attention to), giving it meaning, and providing a strategy.

Mediation occurs through language and direct teaching. Mediation builds learning structures in the head, which allow the learner to accept and process the information. A teacher can teach a perfect lesson, but if the student does not have the structures for accepting and using the information, a great deal of the lesson is lost. Through direct instruction, the undeveloped and under-developed parts of the learning structure can be built.

There are four parts of the structure that must be inside a head before a learner can accept the information. To simply represent these four structures, Figure 1 will be used.

Quite simply, these four structures are:

1) a structure for data and a structure for the discipline;
2) cognitive strategies or processes;
3) conceptual frameworks (schema); and
4) sorting mechanisms.

The First Structure

The first structure is an organized mechanism for data. In an analogy to a house, it is the studs and foundation– the very things that hold the structure intact and make it a structure. In an analogy to a computer, it is the hardware itself. It is the organ of the brain that accepts data and structures it. Everything in the universe has structure and is to a certain extent, defined by that structure. The mind is, to some extent, defined by the brain. In addition, a student needs a structure for each discipline. Structures in disciplines tend to be underlying principles. For example, the key underlying principle in math is to assign order and value to the universe. In chemistry, the key underlying principle is bonding; in algebra, it is solving for the unknown. When the key underlying principle is understood, then the whole discipline has a structure or a way to place data.

The Second Structure: Cognitive Strategies

The second learning structure is cognitive strategies. Feuerstein identified several strategies or processes that an individual must successfully have in order to deal with any piece of data. Feuerstein found that students missed much of the original data (up to 50 percent) when the cognitive strategies were not fully or only partially developed.

These strategies are analogous to the infrastructure of a house – the plumbing system, heating system, electrical system, sewage system, etc. In a house, it is when the systems are not working that we realize our reliance upon them. In a computer, these strategies are analogous to the software. Any individual who has worked with a malfunctioning software package knows the importanceof this part of the structure.

Feuerstein identified student characteristics when these strategies are missing. The strategies have been restated in the positive, i.e., what students can do when these strategies are present. In the mind, these cognitive strategies are the following:

Input Strategies

Input is defined as the "quantity and quality of the data gathered."

1. Use planning behaviors.
2. Focus perception on a specific stimulus.
3. Control impulsivity.
4. Explore data systematically.
5. Use appropriate and accurate labels.
6. Organize space with stable systems of reference.
7. Orient data in time.
8. Identify constancies across variations.
9. Gather precise and accurate data.
10. Consider two sources of information at once.
11. Organize data (parts of a whole).
12. Visually transport data.

Elaboration Strategies

Elaboration strategies are defined as the "use of the data."

1. Identify and define the problem.
2. Select relevant cues.
3. Compare data.
4. Select appropriate categories of time.
5. Summarize data.
6. Project relationships of data.
7. Use logical data.
8. Test hypothesis.
9. Build inferences.
10. Make a plan using the data.
11. Use appropriate labels.
12. Use data systematically.

Output Strategies

Output is defined as the "communication of the data."

1. Communicate clearly the labels and process.
2. Visually transport data correctly.
3. Use precise and accurate laguage.
4. Control impulsive behavior.

What do these strategies mean? Mediation builds these strategies. When these strategies are not present, they can be built. Typically in school, we begin teaching at the elaboration level, i.e., the use of the data. When students do not understand, we reteach these strategies but do not revisit the quality and quantity of the data gathered. In order to better understand input strategies, each is explained in more detail. Typically, input strategies are not directly taught, because we do not know to teach them. However, for unmediated students, these strategies must be taught directly.

Input strategies

(quantity and quality of data)

Using planning behaviors includes goal setting, identifying the procedures in the task, identifying the parts of the task, assigning time to the task(s), and identifying the quality of the work necessary to complete the task.

Focusing perception on a specific stimulus is the strategy of seeing every detail on the page or in the environment. It is the strategy of identifying everything noticed by the five senses.

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"It is when the systems are not working that we realize our reliance upon them"

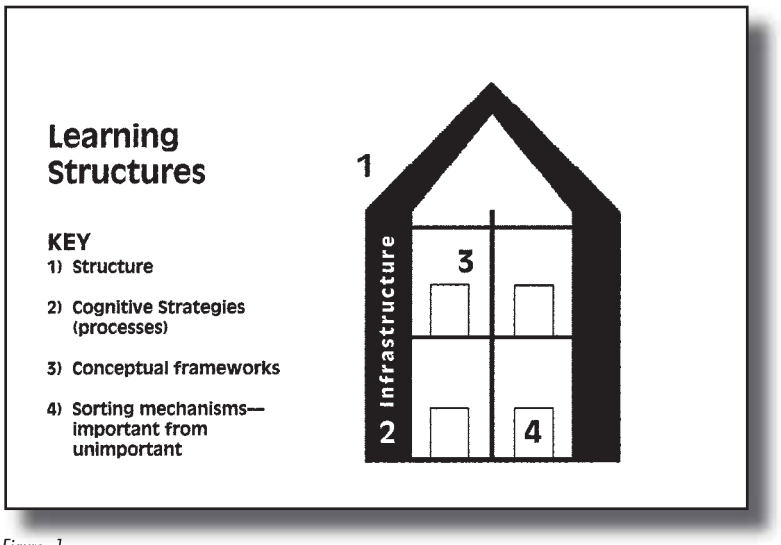


Figure 1

Art and Alternate Students

Lynn Pecknold, *Vice-Principal, Project/VAST Alternate School Program, Port Alberni*

"What are we going to do in Art today?"

Art teaching has to be one of my most enjoyable roles as an educator. I love what I do. Some would say that I am passionate about it. I gallery hop frequently, I communicate with artists regularly and I encourage students to share their talent with themselves and with others. I am involved in creating my own work and spent my last summer painting in my "California Carport Studio". I know this affects the way students respond to art.

In my capacity as Vice-Principal I am permitted to interview most of the students who apply to Vast, which includes completion of a student individual educational plan at a one hour interview.

I guess that's where my art lessons start. I usually ask during my interview with a new student a number of questions trying to probe into the student's skill sets. One of the questions I almost always get around to is whether or not a student has ever been involved in visual or performing arts: such activities as drawing, painting, doodling, singing, dance, drama, monologue, poetry, song-writing, rapping, street dancing, karaoke, electronics, a band, an instrument, etc. are amongst those I might ask. When they say the "magic word" I give them a free sketchbook, which I call a "Visual Journal" and a thin-line black drawing pen.

During the interview, especially when I know a student has some interest in the visual or performing arts, I mention our web site where we can publish student work such as poetry, art, and photography, *http://vastweb.sd70.bc.ca.* I mention our VAST Gallery, which has exhibition frames where we put up student art work, and I show them student art web sites such as *http://www.artsonia.com/schools/vast1* where the work of our students is displayed. I often have a portfolio of current work, which I can also quickly point out to them.

With my students, I try to accept them where they are at. "What are we going to do in art today?" is a matter of what they choose to do in art today. I usually have about three or four projects (not unlike the method a practicing artist might use) going at once and so, they are able to make choices to work on any of three or four projects, or work in their visual journal, or photograph their work for their digital portfolio, or work on a PowerPoint to display their work and so on.

I must consider their attention span which may be short, their interests, which may not be the same as mine, their needs – for food, for their habits, for their hurts, their current situation with friends, family and home, and much more.

Seeds, Michelle Oelrich, Grade 12

What are the values of art education that apply to alternate students and for that matter to all students?

Ten Lessons the Arts Teach
by Elliot Eisner, Stanford University

The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. *Unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail.*

The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution *and that questions can have more than one answer.*

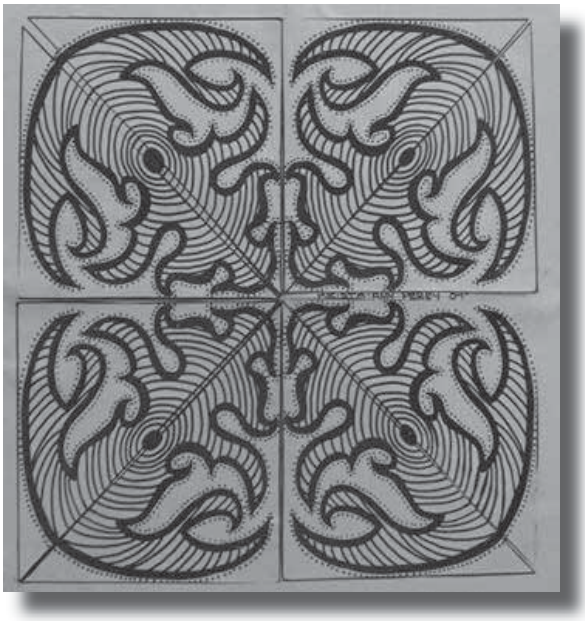
The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. *One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.*

The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, *but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds.*

The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what *we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition.*

The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects. *The arts traffic in subtleties.*

The arts teach students to think through and within a material. *All art forms employ some means through which images become real.*



Blade Runner, Krista Perry, Grade 9

The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said. *When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job.*

The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source *and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling.*

The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young *what adults believe is important.*

Source: *Learning and the Arts: Crossing Boundaries*

I believe that the visual and performing arts are valuable to students at an alternate school for the fact that so many students have talents that they know are within but need to be encouraged.

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"The Arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution"

Avalanche Awareness Program

Gerry Jones, *Project/VAST Alternate School Program, Port Alberni*

> *"If you are not sure of the snow stability, you shouldn't be there"*

Ten students, ten feet of snow, blue skies, and two instructors who have some knowledge and a lot of enthusiasm about being in the backcountry. Put these together with a Student Activity Grant from the BCAEA and a number of great things are likely to happen.

On March 2, 2004, Gary Sutton (Project School), Sandra Piekarz (Vast) and I took 10 students from the Port Alberni Vast Center and Project School to Mt. Washington. This was going to be day one of a two day Avalanche Awareness Program that Gary and I had thought about for several years. The grant made it all possible.

Gary and I had both been involved in an Avalanche Course through ski patrol and search and rescue. An Avalanche Awareness Unit seemed to be a natural and necessary section to be included in my Adventure Learning Course as hopefully the students enrolled may well venture into the back country during the snow season.

Our basic theme centered around safety and risk management: If you're not sure of the snow stability, you shouldn't be there. We started the course by having a session at school where we went over the basic idea of safe travel, snow packs, avalanche causes and formation, survival in snow conditions and snow caves. As with all trips, individual equipment and supplies were discussed. We stressed that this would be different from most trips to the ski hill as they should be prepared for any kind of weather and that they could expect to get very hot, even sweaty.

Equipment is always a problem for this kind of exercise. Luckily we managed to rent, borrow and scrape together enough equipment to run several exercises in two groups of five.

We left Vast at 7:15 a.m. (that's right a.m., who said alternate students can't get out of bed). And drove to the Nordic Lodge where we rented extra snowshoes to supplement the school's small stock of shoes. First surprise for the students: the snowshoes don't look like tennis racquets . Too many cartoons. Second surprise: everyone managed to waddle along on them.

Enough of this civilization stuff. We're off to find the back country. Uphill we trudge onto the top of the nearest ridge, away from those noisy cross-

Snowshoeing on Mt. Washington

Aaron Casavant making a snow cave

country skiers. Ten o'clock and there's not a cloud in the sky. Chris is hot, yeah he's sweating, and complaining a little until Gary reminds him that he could still be in the classroom doing a little algebra. We all move away in horror.

Another surprise: packs are being filled as layers of clothing are removed. They listened to the sermon about dressing in layers." Not much further to go. Just over the next hill," I say. They are not impressed as they seemed to have heard that before. No, really! Just over the next hill we find a beautiful south facing slope, untouched by skiers or shoers. I probe the snow. Yes, eight feet with several distinct layers.

Gary takes half the group and they start digging. The boys dig for 2 hours to isolate a Rutsch Block and a long block for shear tests. They're all sweating.

I take the other group and we use the probes to get a quick idea of the 'Snow History'. Then it's time to play the game "Find the Avalanche Transceiver." I explained how they work to grumbles of "Do I have to put the ear piece in my ear?" Working in pairs, one hides their beacon in the snow and their partner has to find it. This is where you find out how mean your partner can be. Did you have to hike half a mile away to hide your transceiver? YES!

Lunch in the snow. Who ate the most, the students or the Whiskey-Jacks they were feeding?

Back to Gary's merry crew of miners. They had moved enough snow to cover the average ski hill. Gary demonstrated several tests to show snow stability or lack thereof.

The group found the snow layers and melt-freeze layers, took the temperature at different levels, learned about the temperature gradient which was found as a result of the test, and learned why the blocks sheared where they did. So many variables. Sandra was amazed at the amount of knowledge that could be extracted from a block of snow. We even examined the ice and snow crystals under a magnifying glass to prove that they were not all the same shape or size. Good stuff!

$500 Student Activity Grants are just one of $6500 in awards available each year. For more information see the article on page 13, or visit our website: www.bctf.ca/bcaea

"First surprise for the students: The snowshoes don't look like tennis racquets"

Celebrating Success

Jim Lawson, *Project Alternate School Program, Port Alberni*

"There was no telling who was more proud"

You just never know. So often, as an Alternate Education professional, you just never know if, or how much, you've contributed to the success your students will realize in life. Of course we see the many daily successes; improved attendance, completed assignments, grade promotion and even better lifestyle choices. There's certainly no shortage of "immediate gratification" or "job satisfaction" opportunities. That's the kind of thing that keeps us coming back to the classroom day after day. But what about, who your students become when they leave your program (leave home as it were) to take on the world?

I know that many of us have stories we can share of past students who have gone on to realize success and happiness in their lives. We may even appreciate that the influence we had, has contributed in some way. These are very proud moments for all of us.

Bryce Harrison

This past December, I was offered the opportunity to share in a very prideful moment with a student who had attended the program in which I have taught in for nearly 20 years. Bryce Harrison was a Grade 9 student who, like so many students in alternate programs, was having trouble with relationships at home and not meeting with success in mainstream school either. He was assigned to the Project Alternate School Program and was expected to "clean up his act." Bryce met with tremendous success at Project for many months and went on to continue his education.

Now, about 5 or 6 years later, I received a call from Bryce. "Mr. Lawson", he said. "It's Bryce Harrison. Remember me?" "Of course." I said, "How are you doing?" Bryce went on to describe the many successes he had realized and the significant success he was experiencing right now. Not only had Bryce fulfilled his dream of becoming a chef, he was now working in a very "up scale" restaurant in downtown Vancouver. Bryce had called to let the staff at Project know that, in reflecting upon how "good" life had become for him, he appreciated that he didn't do it alone. He wanted us to know that we had played a significant part in helping him to "clean up his act", have faith in himself and to follow his dream.

On the Wednesday night before the BCAEA Challenge and Change Conference, the staff of Project went for dinner at the Glowbal Restaurant in historic Yaletown, Vancouver ("up scale" indeed). We were seated right across from the open kitchen where we were treated to a demonstration of extraordinary culinary skill, a meal to remember and a dessert tray to die for. As we watched Bryce confirm his talent, there was no telling who was more proud; Bryce for getting the chance to show us all how successful he had become, or us for the acknowledgement that we had really made a difference.

Award Applications Deadline March 31st

BCAEA Awards Committee

A reminder to any of you who have students deserving of consideration for a bursary or award that the deadline for applications is approaching. Each year, we distribute up to $6,500 in grants, bursaries, and awards. Complete award criteria and application forms are available on our website, *www.bctf.ca/bcaea/awards.html* or from Rick Fitch, Vice-President whose contact information is on the back cover.

BCAEA Student Bursary

This bursary is available to a graduating student who is, or who has been enrolled in an alternate education program. Four bursaries of $500.

BCAEA Student Achievement Award

This award is available to an at-risk student who is receiving alternative programming. This award is presented as gift certificates to a store selected by the sponsoring teacher. Four awards of $250.

BCAEA Student Development Grant

This award is available to an at-risk student who is receiving alternative programming. This award is presented as a gift certificate to a store selected by the sponsoring teacher. Ten awards of $100.

Kathi Hughes Innovative Programming Award

One award of $500 will be given to an alternative education teacher who is willing to share a unique aspect of their existing program.

BCAEA Activity Grants

Four grants totalling $2000 are available to teachers wishing to plan and engage in an activity to benefit their students. There is no deadline for application.

A lack of applications meant that last year we disbursed less than half the funds available. Apply now!

> "Each year, the BCAEA disburses up to $6,500 in grants, bursaries and awards"

2005 AGM Highlights

***Bonny Burgess**, BCAEA Secretary*

Despite another fabulous lunch provided by the indefatigable Joyce May, membership turnout at the 2005 AGM was very sparse. You are all encouraged to attend next year!

Elections - President (2 year term)

Jim Lawson nominated Rick Fitch for the position of President. As there were no nominations from the floor, Rick was elected by acclamation.

Elections - Vice-President (2 year term)

D.J. Pauls nominated Mike Shaw for the position of Vice-President. As there were no nominations from the floor, Mike was elected by acclamation.

Elections - Newsletter Editor (2 year term)

Rick Fitch nominated Jim Lawson for the position of Newsletter Editor. As there were no nominations from the floor, Jim was elected by acclamation.

Motion

To adopt the constitutional amendments as published in the newsletter and website. Carried.

Learning Structures: Conceptual Frameworks...

(continued from page 7)

"There is a direct correlation with impulsivity control and improved behaviour and achievement"

Controlling impulsivity is the strategy of stopping action until thinking about the task is done. There is a direct correlation with impulsivity control and improved behavior and achievement.

Exploring data systematically means that a strategy is employed to procedurally and systematically go through every piece of data. Numbering is a way to go systematically through data. Highlighting each piece of data can be another method.

Using appropriate and accurate labels is the use of precise words and vocabulary to identify and explain. If a student does not have specific words to use, then his or her ability to retrieve and use information is severely limited. It is not enough that a student can do a task, he/she must also be able to label the procedures, tasks and processes so that the task can be successfully repeated each time and analyzed at a metacognitive level. Metacognition is the ability to think about one's thinking. To do labels must be attached. Only when labels are attached can the task be evaluated and therefore improved.

Organizing space with stable systems of reference is crucial to success in math. It means that up, down, right, left, across, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, etc. are understood. It means that an individual can identify what the position of an item is with labels. It means that an individual can organize space. For example, if an individual does not have this strategy, then it is virtually impossible to tell a "p", "b" and "d" apart. The only differentiation is the orientation in space.

Orienting data in time is the strategy of assigning abstract values to time and the measurement of time. This strategy is crucial for identifying cause- and effect, for determining sequence, and for predicting consequences.

Identifying constancies across variations is the strategy of knowing what always remains the same and what changes. For example, if you do not know what always makes a square a square, you cannot identify constancies. It allows one to define things, to recognize a person or an object, and to compare and contrast. This strategy allows cursive writing to be read with all of its variations. I asked a group of fifth-grade students I was working with this question: "If you saw me tomorrow, what about me would be the same and what would be different?" Many of the students had difficulty with that strategy.

Gathering precise and accurate data is the strategy of using accurate labels, identifying the orientation in time and in space, knowing the constancies, and exploring the data systematically.

Considering two sources of information at once is the strategy of visually transporting data accurately, identifying the constancies and variations, and exploring the data systematically. When that is done, then precise and accurate labels can be assigned.

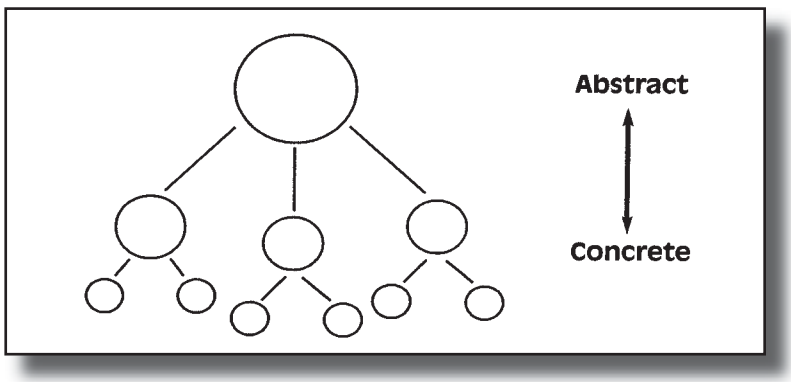

Figure 2

Organizing data (parts of a whole) involves exploring data systematically, organizing space, identifying constancies and variations, and labeling the parts and the whole with precise words.

Visually transporting data is when the eye picks up the data, carries it accurately to the brain, examines it for constancies and variations, and labels the parts and whole. If a student cannot visually transport, then he often cannot read, has difficulty with basic identification of anything, and cannot copy.

Elaboration and output strategies tend to be fairly well understood in schools, because that is where the teaching tends to occur. Feuerstein developed well over 100 instruments to use to build these strategies in the brain.

The Third Structure: Conceptual Frameworks

Conceptual frameworks are the part of the structure that stores and retrieves data. In the house, it is analogous to the rooms. In most houses, rooms are identified by function – the bedroom, the living room, thekitchen, the bathroom, etc.

In a computer, the analogy is to the files. In an oversimplification of conceptual frameworks, they might look something like Figure 2. These frameworks need the general or abstract words so that categories can be made for information, like the files in a computer or the rooms in a house. Development goes from the specific and concrete to the abstract and general.

At least two quick ways are available to diagnose the development and accessibility of conceptual frameworks. First, if a student gives an example rather than a definition, you know that the concrete part of the framework is available, but the abstract part is not. To store much information, abstract words are necessary to assign and label the categories. Casual register has very little abstract terminology, so students who do not have access to formal register have difficulty with assigning things to categories.

The second way to diagnose conceptual frameworks is whether a student can ask a question syntactically. For example, the student will ask, "Don't you have any more?" If a student makes a statement but tonally infers it is a question, e.g. "You don'thave any more?" then a high probability exists that the student has a low reading comprehension score(Palinscar), and the student is unable to access the stored information with any repeated success. If you have a student who cannot answer the test questions unless they are exactly the same as the review questions, then you have a student who cannot access their conceptual frameworks or "files."

Quite simply, if a student cannot ask questions syntactically, his ability to learn is significantly reduced because he cannot identify what he does not know nor can he systematically access what he does know.

There are several ways to build in conceptual frameworks, but one ofthe most successful methods is reciprocal teaching by Anne Palinscar. Another successful method is to make students write their own multiple choice questions using question stems. Vocabulary development is yet another. Tactics for Thinking (Marzano) has several activities that assist in this development.

The Fourth Structure: Models for Sorting

Before any data can be stored so that it can be found, some method for sorting the data must exist. Sorting the data simply means identifying what is important and what is not important. Sorting the data is analogous to the door on the room. It is what allows the entrance and exit to the file. On the computer, it is the click of the cursor on the file.

> "Conceptual frameworks are the part of the structure that stores and retrieves data"

Learning Structures: The Five Models Used for Sorting...

> "We do not teach how to sort important from unimportant"

Students have difficulty sorting information, particularly nonfiction text, because we do not teach how to sort important from unimportant, except as a summary skill. Furthermore, if the student uses a random, episodic story structure, memory is often assigned on the basis of what has emotional significance. Because many students do not have a method for sorting information, they try to remember as much as possible, which is very ineffective.

Skilled learners sort text by the organizational pattern or structure of the text. For example, if an article is about the causes and effects of the Civil War, then the reader would sort for causes and effects. If the text compares and contrasts a given topic, then the reader would want to remember what was alike and what was different. We have given students graphic ways to organize their writing, but we have not given them the models to sort text. Basically, the majority of text that students see in schools can be represented by one of five models. Students are simply taught how to identify the five models and sort text with the five models.

In addition, other teaching techniques are available to assist with sorting. Project Read has several good ideas.

The Five Models to Use For Sorting

In order to remember, the mind must sort through information and store what is important and discard what is not important. In order to remember the important parts of text, the mind needs to sort against the structure of the text.

We have traditionally used graphic organizers to help students write text. Being able to sort the important from the unimportant during reading is the flip side of that coin. Using models to help students sort text gives them a way to remember organizational patterns and to identify what is important. The graphic organizers need to be simple so they are easy to remember. The five symbols in Figure 3 can be used. Any five can be used. Most text that students see in school fits one of these patterns.

How does a teacher use these with students? Give students a piece of text to read and one of the five models. Initially, choose the model that fits the organizational pattern of the text. Put students into pairs. Have them select the most important information and write it into an outline of the model. When finished, use a transparency and help students identify the most important information. Each student should add to his or her written model the information that has been missed.

Because the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) test has so much nonfiction text, students have difficulty because they want to sort using the fiction story structure (see Figure 4) and so remember the characters, setting and plot. By directly teaching them to sort, students can better select the important information.

Five Models To Use For Sorting

	**Hand**	Topical or Descriptive Organization
	**Car**	Fiction Story Structure
	**Ladder**	Narrative, How-to
	**Cross**	Pro/Con Advantages, Disadvantages, Cause and Effect
	**Hamburger**	Position with Proof

Figure 3

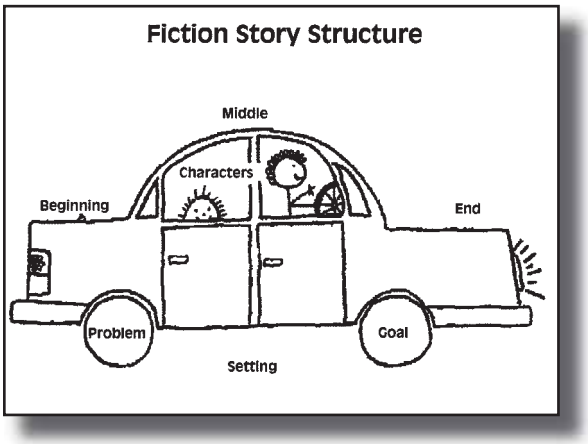

Figure 4

Conclusion

The less mediated the student is, the more need the student has for direct instruction in these structures. For several of the reasons I cited in Part 1 of this article, many students from poverty do not have these structures sufficiently in place to do well on the TAAS.

All that means is that we must provide direct instruction to build these in their minds. It means that we trade out some of the activities we use that do not have a great amount of payoff in achievement for those that have a higher payoff. For example, rather than having students answer questions at the end of the chapter, they can compose questions. When a student does not have orientation in space, we embed that as a part of the instruction.

Direct instruction to build these strategies is imperative because of the issue of time. Historically, the reason individuals hired teachers or tutors was to provide the learning more efficiently than the individual could without assistance. Trial and error, as well as experience, can be valuable teachers, but they take more time.

It will be from our interventions with the learning structures that greater strides in student achievement will come. Students who have been traditionally successful in school came to school with learning structures; we built our traditional instructional design around the notion that these would be in place.

But these structures can be built. Someone built them in the minds of students who come to school ready to learn. At school, Feuerstein builtthem successfully into students who at 12 and 13 years old did not have them. As we reframe our instruction to include their construction, student achievement will increase.

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"The less mediated the student is, the more need the student has for direct instruction"

Empty Vessels...

(continued from page 3)

> "The majority of school shooters were suicidal"

A key question then, in assessing empty vessels, is what emotional system seems to be contributing the most to the students "justification process" for moving on a course towards violent behaviour? Is the student being bullied at school or abused at home? Is the student under unreasonable pressure from home to achieve and is now weighed down by failures he or she is keeping secret from parents? Or, did he or she lose a close friend to suicide and is now confronted with a traumatically closed school dynamic that suppresses emotional pain but elevates other high risk symptoms as a result?

When multiple factors are present the risk may increase substantially. A student whose primary emotional system is a family where they are being physically abused by an older sibling while parents turn a blind eye may have an even greater risk of acting out against home or school if they are also being physically abused at school (secondary emotional system) and believe the "staff" are likewise turning a blind eye. This is referred to as a "parallel process" which means the same dynamic is influencing an individual in two separate human systems (e.g. home and school). When neither system is a stabilizing force, violence potential is increased.

As the empty vessel becomes less and less connected to healthy human systems they start to look elsewhere in search of people or things to be identified with. These students are experiencing significant emotional pain as they look for identification of meaning in self. Some end up identifying with the aggressors in their lives and others begin to identify with those more publicly infamous: our school shooters. When this happens, these empty vessels draw content from high profile violence that they can identify with that differs from that of other students. The student considering an attack against their school may view attackers from other incidents of school violence as "lame" or "pathetic". Their reason for this critique is that in their opinion the numbers of dead were too low. They may see themselves as taking far more people "out" when they launch an attack.

They also give us a further clue to their own emotional pain when the high-risk student concludes their critique with "and I can't believe they didn't kill themselves afterwards". This last comment is important because the majority of school shooters were suicidal. The same is holding true for the majority of threat makers who have come to our attention. Although most threat makers do not pose a risk to others they often are students experiencing intense emotional pain.

When students reach the point of identification with other aggressors, the concept of an empty vessel becomes more clear in its relevance to threat assessment. In the assessment process the question becomes, "what is the empty vessel filling themselves up with?" Students moving rapidly towards committing serious school violence are filling themselves up with a variety of things from violent books and video games to personal stories and drawings depicting their building anger and desperation. Their Internet journeys reflect themes of violence and hatred, as well, and they always tell someone what they are planning. They always become threat makers before carrying out a plan. In many cases of completed homicide we believe the threats were an attempt to draw attention to their intensifying desperation.

Although it is a double-edged sword, the good news with empty vessels is that they are highly influenced by context and thus responding to their threat making behaviour can create a new context to decrease risk if we do it right!

Alternate Art...

(continued from page 9)

Art education has many of the same missions as alternte programs do, including:

- addressing the unique needs of individual learners related to one-on-one teaching;
- supporting the need for self-paced learning;
- developing lifelong learning;
- facilitating the preparation of individuals in a changing world;
- encouraging the development of self-esteem and self-discipline;
- encouraging and modeling responsible exploration and decision making;
- employing a variety of learning strategies;
- using technology as a tool;
- team-building with community projects in mind;
- providing teacher-advisor support; and
- learning of our various cultures within communities.

LINKS:

The BC Art Teachers' Association has valuable resources listed at *http://www.bctf.ca/bcata/home.html* and explains the value of the arts in their downloadable poster ***Why Arts?*** *http://www.bctf.ca/bcata/downloads/visartposter.pdf*

Other valuable resources can be found at:

The Canadian Society of Education Through Art
http://www.csea-scea.ca/

The National Art Education Association
http://www.naea-reston.org

International Society of Education Through Art
http://www.insea.org/

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