

"Every kid deserves a good teacher!"

Janet Griffith, Associate Superintendent, Alberta Conference, Red Deer, AB

That was the cry of Marshall as he listened to a dinner guest expound on the needs and achievements of gifted-talented students. In her book *"Exceeding Expectations: A User's Guide to Implementing Brain Research in the Classroom"*, author Susan Kovalik relates the story of Marshall. "As the testimonials rolled on, my son spun his corner-fold napkin to make a loop and pretended to hang himself, gagging for added effect. As I stared in disbelief at my son, I was further shocked as he burst out: "Do you really believe that the only students who want a good teacher and something interesting to learn are the ones that score high on a one-hour test?" In response, our dinner hostess said he seemed a little hostile. "Yes," he said, "my brother and sister who were in a gifted and talented program get all the good teachers and I get the leftovers. And no one ever asked me what I wanted."



Three years later, Marshall came home from high school in January of his senior year announcing he was quitting. He challenged his mother to go sit in his classes for a day and at the end of the day if she could look him in the eye and tell him that six more months of that would really enhance who he was as a person, they would talk about it. She went to his school, and sat in his classes, and she could not look him in the eye and say, "Yes, it would!"

After extensive research, Marshall's mother discovered how the brain learns. Some of her earlier experiences of methods working in the classroom discovered the methods worked because they allowed students' brains to work the way they naturally work; the strategies were "brain-compatible." In fact, anyone could learn the techniques that work for all students-not just the gifted-talented, not just reluctant learners, but ALL students.

So on behalf of all the "Marshalls" who want and deserve good teachers and something interesting to learn, the Integrated Thematic Instruction model of teaching was designed.

The ITI model has two main goals: 1. To create participating citizens, willing and able to engage in our democratic processes to improve life now and for future generations. 2. To help educators translate current brain research into practical strategies for the classroom and school wide. These two goals are in harmony with what we were given over 100 years ago by Ellen White. "Present an education that is as high as heaven and as broad as the universe." *True Education*, p. 13. "True teachers are not satisfied with second rate work. They are not satisfied with directing their students to a standard lower than it is possible for them to reach. ...It is their ambition to inspire students with principles of truth, obedience, honor, integrity, and purity...principles that will make them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society...desire...above all else, to learn life's great lesson of unselfish service." *True Education*, p. 21

The knowledge of how the brain works is used for decision-making about what's worth teaching as we develop curriculum and instructional strategies that will work best. Schools in the 21st century must act

on best practice informed by brain research rather than traditional education and habit.

The ITI model is based on the following five basic principles of brain biology:

1. *Intelligence* is a function of experience.
2. Learning is an inseparable partnership between *brain* and *body*.
 1. emotion is the gatekeeper to learning and performance
 2. movement enhances learning
3. There are *multiple intelligences* or ways of solving problems and/or producing products.
4. Learning is a *two-step process*:
 - Step 1: Making meaning through pattern seeking
 - Step 2: Developing a mental program for using what we understand and wiring it into long-term memory
5. *Personality* impacts learning and performance

Susan Kovalik continues her book with the nine bodybrain-compatible elements of curriculum development and instruction. These are the primary ways of translating brain research into application in the classroom. The nine elements are:

1. Absence of threat/nurturing reflective thinking
2. Meaningful content
3. Movement
4. Enriched Environment
5. Choices
6. Adequate time
7. Immediate Feedback
8. Collaboration
9. Mastery/Application

If even one of these bodybrain-compatible elements is not in place, the learning environment is not bodybrain-compatible. Basing our improvement efforts on brain research urges us to use old tools differently and for new purposes. When old tools are used in new ways, with the purpose of translating brain research into action, you will be amazed at the changes in student behavior, attitudes, and test scores. You'll also find yourself enjoying teaching more than you ever thought possible.

It is because of the changes observed in bodybrain-compatible classrooms that the Alberta Conference has taken on the huge project of implementing the ITI Model of teaching in all Seventh-day Adventist school classrooms in Alberta. The ITI model was first introduced to administrators who attended the ASDASA Convention in Pittsburgh, February, 2003. Eventually, the ITI model became a project funded by Alberta Learning to enhance student learning.

"The great principles of education are unchanged. "They stand fast forever and ever" (Ps. 111:8), for they are the principles of the character of God. To aid the student in comprehending these principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher's first effort and constant aim. The teacher who accepts this aim is in truth a coworker with Christ, a laborer together with God." *True Education* p. 22

In conclusion, I'd like to challenge the teachers of Canada to make sure that "every kid deserves a good

teacher" and with God's help you can be that good teacher.

Resources:

- White, Ellen G. *True Education, An Adaptation of Education*. Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000
- Kovalik, Susan J. and Karen D. Olsen *Exceeding Expectations: A User's Guide to Implementing Brain Research in the Classroom Second Edition*. Susan Kovalik & Associates, Inc. 2002