# LEADERSHIP
# UPDATE

# DEHR and Administrators

Alberta's rapidly changing demographics are creating an exciting cultural diversity that is reflected in the province's urban and rural classrooms. The new landscape of the school provides an ideal context in which to teach students that strength lies in diversity. The challenge that teachers face is to capitalize on the energy of today's intercultural classroom mix to lay the groundwork for all students to succeed. To support teachers in their critical roles as leaders in inclusive education, the Alberta Teachers' Association established the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Standing Committee (DEHR) in 2000.

DEHR aims to assist educators in their legal, professional and ethical responsibilities to protect all students and to maintain safe, caring and inclusive learning environments. Topics of focus for DEHR include intercultural education, inclusive learning communities, gender equity, UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, sexual orientation and gender variance.

**It is difficult to see the picture when you are inside of the frame.**

*—Author unknown*

Activities of the DEHR Committee include the following:

- Studying, advising and making recommendations on policies that reflect respect for diversity, equity and human rights
- Offering Inclusive Learning Communities Grants (up to $2,000) to support activities that support inclusion
- Producing *Just in Time,* an electronic newsletter that can be found at www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/Other%20Publications/Pages/Just%20in%20Time%20Newsletter.aspx or http://tinyurl.com/7l3w4rs
- Providing and creating print and web-based teacher resources
- Creating a list of presenters on DEHR topics
- Supporting the Association instructor workshops on diversity

Administrators are uniquely situated to bring topics of diversity directly to their teachers, schools and communities. Administrators are encouraged to share the challenges and successes they may experience in terms of diversity in their own schools and to incorporate these discussions into staff meetings, school newsletters/websites and casual conversations in the staff room. Diversity, equity and human rights affect the work of all administrators, teachers and students. What are you doing to make a difference?

Further information about the work of DEHR can be found on the Association's website at www.teachers.ab.ca under Teaching in Alberta/Diversity, Equity and Human Rights. Alternatively, please contact Andrea Berg, executive staff officer, Professional Development, at andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca.

# Getting to "Got It!"

## *Betty K Garner, EdD*

Most teachers work very hard to clearly explain new concepts, so why are there so many students who don't get it? We can be the best teachers in the world, but students are the only ones who can create learning. *Getting to "Got It!"* offers a different perspective that addresses some of the fundamental issues that cause students to struggle in school. It focuses on helping students develop the cognitive structures (mental tools) they need to make sense of what we are presenting in class. Because so much has changed in our fast-paced society, many children are not receiving the kind of adult–child interactions (mediation) at home that would normally facilitate cognitive development and come to us without the basic cognitive structures we assume they have.

Information is doubling at such a pace that we can't begin to keep up with it. Some teachers feel overwhelmed and cling to their tried-and-true instructional methods, while others jump at every new innovation that comes along in hopes of finding a solution to deal with the daily challenges confronting them and their students. When we focus on equipping students to learn how to learn, we go to the essence of the teaching/learning process.

Cognitive research sheds light on how the mind uses cognitive structures to gather, organize and process information. As adults, we process information so automatically that we have difficulty understanding what it is like for students who do not have effective cognitive structures and for whom things are just hard to understand. When we work with students who are struggling, it is helpful to explore how they perceive and process information. The senses are the only connection the mind has to the outside world, so we have to start with understanding how students input information.

1. *Students input information through their senses.* The kind and quality of information gathered depends on how students use their senses to notice, that is, to be reflectively aware of sensory input. Because of multimedia overload, many students cannot focus attention and are unaware of what their senses are transmitting to their minds. Our voices and visuals blend into a blurred clutter of vague signals with little meaning. Even though we clearly taught a lesson, students may not have heard or seen what we said or presented. Instead of immediately labelling students as attention-deficit disordered, we need to literally teach them how to become reflectively aware of their sensory input and to trust their own ability to notice relevant characteristics of specific things they are seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling or experiencing.
   - ➢ See what happens if you start asking a few simple, open-ended questions like "What do you see?" "What do you notice?" or "Tell me in your own words what you heard." It is important to encourage students to trust their own senses rather than just repeat

what they hear or try to guess what the teacher wants them to say. Be sure to accept what students notice without judgment.

2. *Visualization transforms sensory data into mental representations.* Once information is gathered by our senses, we transform what is outside to a mental depiction on the inside of our minds. This representation can be based on all sensory input modalities—visual, auditory, symbolic, tactile, etc. Too often, students limit their ability to use their imaginations as a powerful learning tool to visualize information. Without visualization, students do not make information their own. As a result, they become disengaged and resort to memorization of what the teachers say without creating meaning. Students live in such a vivid, noisy world that they rarely have a moment of quiet to see what is in their minds.

➢ See what happens if you ask students to close their eyes and picture (visualize) the content of the history lesson, the science experiment, the math problem, the reading or writing lesson, the musical sounds, the texture of a fabric, the smell of a flower, the taste of a fruit, the movement of a dance, the cold of a winter storm, etc. If the students can't visualize information, it is not their own to carry with them in their minds when they leave the class. Only through mental representation and manipulation of variables can students creatively solve problems and come up with original ideas.

3. *Cognitive structures process information for meaning.* Once students gather information from the outside and transform it into internal mental representations, they use cognitive structures to process it for meaning by

• *making connections* with prior knowledge and experience. This process uses the cognitive structures of recognition and memory access to see what goes together.

• *finding patterns and relationships* by comparing bits of information to see how they are alike and different. This process uses the comparative cognitive structures of conservation of constancy, classification, metaphorical thinking, and spatial and temporal orientation.

• *identifying predictable rules* that make processing faster and automatic. This process uses symbolic representation cognitive structures to transform information within a cultural context into coding systems like language (verbal, nonverbal), quantification (numbers, signs of operation, symbols, etc), graphics (2-D and 3-D visuals, art, etc), music (sounds, rhythms, etc),
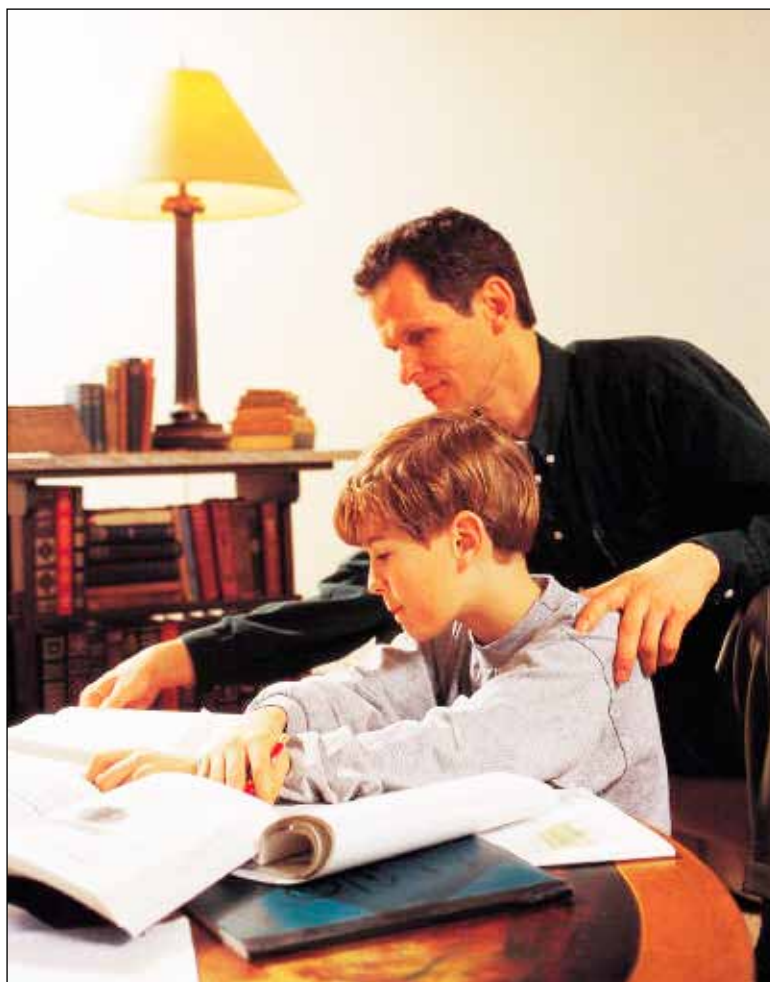
kinesthetics (dance, movement, balance, etc) to make processing accessible to others through various forms of communication.

- *pulling out abstract principles* that transfer and apply to many situations different from the one where the information was first encountered. This process uses logical cognitive structures like deductive and inductive reasoning; cause-effect reasoning; hypothetical thinking and logical reasoning; analysis-synthesis-evaluation; problem framing; and creative problem solving.

  ➢ See what happens if you ask students at the end of a lesson to explain orally (first in a pair-and-share activity, then in large-group discussion) or in writing: "What part do you know for sure?" "How would explain this to someone two years younger than you?" "What sense are you making of this?" "How does this apply to your life?"

4. *Cognitive structures develop metability*, which is the interactive dynamic of learning, creating and changing. To learn is to create, to create is to change, to change is to learn. When students develop their metability, they are able to continuously learn on their own by making sense of unfamiliar information. This is how children naturally learn before they come to school. Young children are constantly exploring, questioning, imagining, creating, changing and learning. However, one of the first things children learn in kindergarten is that the teacher asks the questions and they have to get the correct answer. As we nurture development

of cognitive structures and metability, we can assess our effectiveness as teachers by the kinds of questions the students ask us and by the kind and quality of research they do on their own.

➢ See what happens when you have students read a chapter or do an activity and then assign a task of coming up with two or three questions they wonder about based on what they read or what they did (that is, not questions for which they can find the answer in the text or activity itself). See what happens if you present an unfamiliar task or concept to the students without any explanation and ask them to figure out what to do.

5. *All learning is permeated with values, beliefs and feeling.* These spiritual dimensions of learning directly affect every aspect of teaching/learning interactions. Students tend to listen more with their hearts than with their heads. When we take time to identify the critical elements of effective teaching and learning, we find a long list of intangible (spiritual) characteristics like respect, trust, cooperation, patience, persistence, courage, creativity, flexibility, purpose, passion, effective communication, responsibility, love, acceptance, etc, that must be present. If we truly believe our children are sacred, that every child is unique, and that all can learn, then our thoughts, words and actions would give evidence of these values, beliefs and feelings. We teach who we are.

➢ See what happens if you take a few minutes of quiet time each morning to recharge your

batteries and focus on positive thoughts during the day. See what happens when you align what you think with what you say, what you do, who you are. See what happens if the Golden Rule (treat others the way we want to be treated) is the standard of behaviour for you and the children.

## Concluding Thoughts

You are invited to participate in the summer Educational Leadership Academy, in Banff, where you will learn more about cognitive structures and how to help students develop them by using your everyday curriculum. The interactive, hands-on seminar is designed for teachers and administrators to design lessons that enhance learning and cognitive development.

After participating in a "Getting to 'Got It!'" seminar last spring at the ASCD international conference, several administrators wrote

- Such a missing piece and new perspective! Immediately could see kids who are missing these pieces—ready to get your book. THANKS!

- It clicked how students may lack basic cognitive strategies and how this affects their success. What also stood out is how I tend to go right for the abstract instead of building toward it. This seems to mirror my own thinking. Also the importance of visualizing and connecting to prior knowledge and reflective thinking. I will use the strategies in my own class, building up to abstract thinking, but first knowing my students through assessing their

sensory cognition. I will also go back to allowing students the opportunity for more reflective thinking. I will share what I learned with colleagues; use open-ended questions that are student centred; get more sleep. Let them do the work! Take care of my mind, body and spirit!

- It is important to teach the whole child. Teachers teach so much more than the curriculum. They teach who they are. I will help teachers realize how important their job is and what they do in a child's life.
- Oh my gosh! Thank you so much! I am going to plan my next staff meeting around learning and teaching to begin this work.
- Your session was my best one of the conferences. It all makes sense! Practical, useful info.
- All of this makes sense as far as how we process and display information. I need to share your book/ideas with my staff to create synergy for student learning.
- Basic cognitive structures need to be taught as part of instruction. I will help teachers recognize the need and application of cognitive structures in their classrooms.
- The book *Getting to "Got It!* came alive today. Learning is evident when we allow the learner to determine that they in fact have "got it." I will utilize this info in helping others, particularly the indicators of cognitive structures!



# Q & A

**GORDON THOMAS**
Executive Secretary

**Question:** Teachers have been given an anonymous survey to complete to evaluate my performance during the last year. Is this OK? Does the Association support these?

**Answer:** Anonymous questionnaires have been used extensively in assessing various educational aspects and are notoriously unreliable and unethical when commenting on the professional performance or reputation of a colleague.

The Association abhors the use of anonymous comments because anonymity permits inaccurate comments to be made with impunity. Schools and school staff should be subject to open, honest, fair and effective evaluation by objective criteria and standards.

The teacher presented with a questionnaire for submission to a proper authority may choose to respond, sign the questionnaire and present it to the teacher whose competence, professional performance or professional reputation is being judged. Reports must be submitted only in good faith and only to proper officials. No person can relieve teachers of their professional responsibilities under the Code.

A teacher who completes anonymous questionnaires about the competence, reputation or performance of a teacher or who directs other teachers to complete such questionnaires may be charged with unprofessional conduct and be required to appear before a hearing of a Professional Conduct Committee.

If you have further questions about anonymous surveys, please contact the executive staff officers in Member Services.

**To find archived issues of *Leadership Update,* go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click on Other Publications (under Publications), then go to School Administrators.**

**Feedback is welcome. Please contact Konni deGoeij, associate coordinator, administrator assistance, Member Services, at konni.degoeij@ata.ab.ca.**

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# TGSE

## Teacher Growth, Supervision, Evaluation and Practice Review

A Workshop for Administrators

**August 20—21, 2012**
**Barnett House, Edmonton**

8:30 am—4:00 pm

The Alberta Teachers' Association

Joyce Sherwin

Executive Staff Officer

The Alberta Teachers' Association

# Monday

**The workshop will cover the following topics:**

**Teacher Growth**
- Leadership for Teacher Growth
- Overview of Policy 2.1.5
- Teacher Growth and Alberta Policy
- The Teacher Growth Process
- Activity: What Matters?
- The Teacher Growth Process—More Than Policy
- Tips for Working with Teachers
- Sources of Feedback for Teacher Reflection
- Teacher Growth Plan Questions
- Activity: Key Elements of Effective Professional Development Practices
- The Principal as Professional Development Leader
- Teacher Growth Key Messages

## Monday

**Supervision**
- Overview of Supervision
- The Difference Between Supervision and Evaluation
- What Is Supervision?
- What Is Evaluation?
- The Evolution of Educational Supervision
- Teacher's Decisions Resulting in Optimum Learning
- Supervision for Optimum Learning
- The *Alberta School Act*
- Supervision of Teachers
- Purpose of Supervision
- Supervision as a Partnership
- Reflections: Thinking About a Supervision Plan
- Moving from Supervision to Evaluation
- Justifiable Reasons for Moving from Supervision to Evaluation
- Steps from Supervision to Evaluation
- Developing a Supervision Plan
- Supervision Key Messages

The Alberta Teachers' Association

## Tuesday

**Evaluation**
- What Is Evaluation?
- Evaluation—Based on Rules of Fairness and Natural Justice
- Evaluation Policy 2.1.5
- Flow Chart: Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation
- Moving from Supervision to Evaluation
- Activity: What Matters Most?
- Ministerial Order (#016/97) Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta
- Indication of Unsatisfactory Performance
- When a Discipline Approach Is Required
- Crucial Elements of Evaluation Processes
- Duty of Fairness
- Right of Representation
- Critical Elements of Documentation Throughout the Processes
- The Notice of Evaluation
- The Evaluation Plan
- The Evaluation Report
- Conferencing
- Notice of Remediation
- Practice Review Procedures in Accordance with ATA Practice Review Bylaws
- Procedural Cautions
- Advice Given to Teachers from the Association About Evaluations

Note: Workshop materials are distributed to workshop participants only.