



The Trillium

June 2005

Ontario Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

New and Exciting Ways to Engage the Brain in the Classroom

Are you interested in serving on the Ontario ASCD Board of Directors?

The Nominating Committee is now accepting submissions for nominees.

There are currently two unfilled positions on the OASCD Board of Directors. We are seeking to extend our diversity in employment roles, geographic location, ethnicity, and gender.

Nominees for the Board of Directors must be members in good standing of the Ontario affiliate and ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), possessing strong communication and collaborative skills. Expectations include familiarity with the mission of both ASCD and Ontario ASCD, experience related to the fields of teaching and learning, commitment to participate actively in regular Board meetings and to accept fiduciary responsibility for the conduct of a non-profit organization.

If you are interested in serving on the Board for a two or three year term, please contact Mary Nanavati for further details. She will be pleased to outline the position responsibilities and forward your name to the Nominations Committee.

Mary Nanavati, Nominations Committee Chairperson. E-mail: marynan@idirect.com

The Trillium is also available on our website.

Ontario ASCD: www.ascd.ca

ASCD International: www.ascd.org

President's Message

Over the past two years, I have had the privilege of serving as your president and feeling part of a very special community. During that time, I not only learned a great deal about education in Ontario, but I became much more aware of many global educational issues. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend ASCD functions where I networked with enthusiastic educators from around the world. What an amazing feeling of community that develops.

Involvement with ASCD at any level develops a sense of community. Individuals who interact at the regional level have a special role to play. This is the grassroots level offering relevant professional development sessions that address the needs of educators in that area. Becoming a member of Ontario ASCD has really broadened my perspective of provincial and national issues in education. Newsletters, journals and the Ontario ASCD website highlight educational events in Ontario and across Canada. The spring conference provides a great opportunity to hear internationally renowned speakers and local practitioners and heightens awareness of the bonds we share.

Working with the ASCD Board of Directors has been an incredible growth experience, surrounded by leaders who have a passion for education and a vision for improvement. I have been blessed by the camaraderie, resilience, and collegiality that permeate our entire board.

The opportunity to serve on two international committees exposed me to some great thinkers in the education forum and helped me develop as a professional. I would recommend getting involved with Ontario ASCD for a rich, fulfilling experience.

I am now looking forward to working with our newly elected president, Ivan Saari, a secondary school curriculum coordinator from the Renfrew County District School Board. Ivan has extensive experience working with associations and curriculum development and will be a wonderful ambassador for Ontario ASCD.

- Bev Inglis

Ontario ASCD, a diverse learning community that promotes excellence in education, is dedicated to supporting the growth and success of all learners.

Get in the Game: Using Video Games in Classrooms

Jennifer Jenson **and** **Natasa Vujanovic**

Assistant Professor

Teacher

Pedagogy and Technology, York Univ. York Region DSB

In this piece, we give a truncated argument as to why educators might consider taking a closer look at videogames — what they might offer by way of “good learning principles” and how they might be used as an integrative part of classroom curriculum.

Why Computer Games?

Long viewed as artifacts of an “unpopular culture,” particularly by educators and educational theorists, commercial videogames have begun to be recognized as highly effective learning environments where player (learner) agency is paramount, and where the acquisition of knowledge and competency is part of engaging and pleasurable play, not a prescribed task (de Castell and Jenson, 2003).

In his recent (2003) work on videogames, James Paul Gee articulates a series of “learning principles” that commercial video-

games enact. He claims, for example, that learning in videogames is not accomplished through the delivery of content, under-

stood as abstracted “facts;” rather meaning and significance arise through the player’s activation and negotiation of images, objects, events, and so on, in specific situations of challenge. He challenges classrooms to imagine similar kinds of “teaching”. Alongside their ability to contextualize and embody meaning through player agency and exploration, Gee notes that videogames also provide good models for understanding the educational problem of “transfer,” where solutions to an earlier problem require modification in the face of a new challenge. Transfer, Gee explains, requires that learners identify the similarities and differences between two sets of circumstances; while schools often structure

such situations deliberately he notes that “direct” transfer rarely happens in “real life”. Videogames, however, excel at offering a range of circumstances which call for the continual updating of previously-learned strategies (either from the same game or, as importantly, from other games) in order to move on in the game. That these challenges are often framed as urgent “life-or-death” situations, and that the consequences of a poorly-modified strategy are often immediate, means that players must reflect on and innovate previous solutions “on the spot” (Gee 2003, p.127).

Classroom Implementation: An example

In my Master’s work that was completed last school year, I (Natasa) focused my efforts on new literacy theory and post literate practices, and took up the question of whether or not popular media,

namely video games, could be used as an effective tool for teaching curriculum content. Through investigating theory surrounding post-

literate practice, and conducting action-research within my own classroom, I have been able to use video games to teach about narrative structure across media, a process that I feel has helped to heighten the level of engagement and critical thinking of my students within the classroom.

More particularly, then, my research developed a “video game unit” that spanned approximately four weeks, and required each of the 28 students in my grade seven English class to partner with another student in playing one of four pre-selected videogames during class time.

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Get in the Game: Using Video Games in Classrooms Continued

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Throughout the unit, each student kept a journal of their progress in the game and responded to a series of directed journal and discussion questions that were later used to develop a comparative analysis of videogames and novels

“In our ongoing work in classrooms both at the elementary and university-level, we continue to explore our own presumptions about what “literate practice” is and how to recognize its forms in an increasingly digitized world. Familiarity at least and some facility with videogames gives both of us as teachers a much needed window into the everyday lives and practices of our students, especially our male students for whom video/console game playing can be a large part of their lives *outside* of school.”

(see <http://www.yorku.ca/playces/natasa/project.htm>). A large part of the interest here was in engaging students in classroom learning through a medium that draws on their *own* cultural experiences and interests in order to provide them with an alternative mode/medium for expressing and practicing literacy.

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The award-winning Ontario ASCD journal is seeking articles for its next issue. Visit the Ontario ASCD website for the guidelines for writers at: www.ascd.ca. Below is a description of the theme for the upcoming issue.

Teaching and Leading Strategically

Teachers are leaders and school leaders are teachers. All are educators. In today’s fast-paced world of school accountability, teachers and leaders continue to make choices based on what is best for student learning.

Instructional and assessment practices, resources, use of time, organization, staff development and school initiatives need to be carefully orchestrated. Teachers and leaders think and plan intentionally, constantly asking themselves, “How will this benefit student learning? How will this benefit our school?” Teachers and leaders are informed by research, data, best practices, inquiry and reflection. Teaching and leading strategically includes asking the following questions:

How are educators strategic in their decision making?

How do educators use data for school-wide improvement?

How do teachers and leaders use internal and external research as a foundation for decision-making and nurturing resilience?

How do teachers and leaders sustain continuous student learning and school improvement?

Brain Theory Impacts Teaching and Learning

Kelly Manning

Teacher

Toronto Catholic District School Board

I recently had the distinct privilege of meeting and speaking with two well informed and passionate educators, Jim Craigen and Chris Ward. Jim and Chris were scheduled to deliver a workshop at the Ontario ASCD Conference held this past April at the Doubletree International Plaza Hotel in Mississauga. I sat down with them before their presentation and they graciously shared some of their research and insights gained from that research. Jim and Chris both work with the Durham District School Board. Jim is an Instructional Facilitator and Chris is a Superintendent of Schools. Both are knowledgeable and passionate about their field of research: Brain Theory and its Implications for Teaching and Learning. They first shared a central concept of their work which involves understanding and exploring the brain enriched school community. They explained that a brain enriched school community includes the 3 “E’s”: Emotional security, Elaborate rehearsal and an Enriched environment. Emotional security is fostered in a community where students feel safe to express themselves and to take risks in their learning. The importance of this lies in the fact that the brain is an organ which is acutely linked to the need for survival. If a person feels threatened, then he/she is concerned with survival, and is not able to learn. Research has revealed that emotions are biological functions of the nervous system and strongly influence attention and memory. It makes sense, then, that an emotionally secure environment, which encourages laughter, wonder and excitement, would be crucial in making learning meaningful and memorable.

Elaborate rehearsal is the second ingredient required for a brain-enriched school community. Rehearsal itself can be defined as the processing of information which allows us to hold data in consciousness (working memory) for longer than a few seconds, and to work with the information in such a way as to ensure its transfer to long-term memory. Elaborate rehearsal involves integrating information in such a way that it is given meaning using strategies such as mind mapping, chunking information, visualizing

and role-playing. Elaborate rehearsal strives to attach meaning, and in so doing, increases the chances that information will be retained in long-term memory and can be accessed with greater ease when needed. The third factor in a brain enriched school community is an Enriched environment. An Enriched environment is composed of characteristics that enable the learner to be active, engaged and immersed in both the curriculum and the wider school community. An Enriched environment provides a multitude of experiences that honor different learning styles and allow for collaboration between students, both within the grades and across the grades. Seat work is minimized and the teacher acts as facilitator, employing various instructional strategies and encouraging students to see connections in their learning.

As accountability becomes increasingly crucial, knowledge of Brain Theory will help guide our strategies and planning in the classroom. A teacher who uses brain-compatible strategies such as graphic organizers and visual aids, who plans for cooperative learning situations, and who accommodates various learning styles is demonstrating sensitivity and understanding of how the brain works. The result will be a teacher more effective in his/her practice.

On any given day, in newspapers, magazines, journals, and on radio and television reports, there are thought-provoking pieces of information that uncover more and more of the workings of the brain. The average consumer, with knowledge at his/her fingertips, is well equipped to ask tough questions and to expect well informed answers. The question is: Are we, as educators, prepared to deliver thoughtful answers that reveal an ever evolving and ever expanding understanding of that most precious organ that we must constantly nourish, enrich and engage: the brain?

Reference: *Craigen, J., & Ward, C. (2005, April). Brain Research is EEEasy! Handout accompanying presentation at the Ontario Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Ontario ASCD) conference The Art and Soul of Teaching, Global Implications for Classroom Practice, Toronto, ON.*

Meet Our New Members

A New President and Three New Additions

To the
Ontario ASCD Board of Directors

Ivan Saari - Our New President

Ivan Saari currently works as the Secondary School Curriculum Coordinator for the Renfrew County District School Board. His responsibilities include every aspect of Secondary education and the training associated with Board and Ministry of Education initiatives. He has been: a member of the provincial Policy to Practice Assessment and Evaluation team, in Europe establishing marking/reporting systems consistent across multi-country curricula, I.T. Chair for the Ontario Business Educators' Association, Course Coordinator at the Ontario Educational Leadership Centre, a published author, and organizer of multiple conference and PD Retreats. He has presented at the Ministry of Education for Secondary School Reform in Phase 8 and 9 and in many cities around the province on both Assessment and I.T. topics.

Dave Bird

Dave Bird is the Principal of Pinehurst School in St. Catharines.

We welcome his regional input from our Niagara community in Southwestern Ontario.

Dave is an Honours Specialist in both Business Studies and Special Education, and has served as a principal for the last 5 years.

He is currently completing graduate studies (Organizational and Administrative Studies in Education) at Brock University, and is a Board member of the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools.

Dave is particularly looking forward to further developing effective, informative, and collaborative working relationships amongst public, separate, and private schools across Ontario.

Lesley Brien

Lesley Brien currently works as a Literacy Consultant with Waterloo Region Student Success. Her interests include implementation of research-based practice and curriculum writing. She was fortunate to participate in writing teams for the OSSLC and LDCC English Profiles, is currently creating resources for a project linking LBS and the Essential Skills, and recently co-managed resource writing teams for the WRDSB school-work program and a Tri-Board Credit Recovery Writing Project. Lesley has worked for the Waterloo Region District School board for twenty-six years.

Joanne Robinson

Joanne Robinson's former board was Oxford County and then Thames Valley District School Board.

As teacher she has taught in the junior and intermediate divisions, mainly in phys. ed. and guidance. She served as the executive assistant in the curriculum branch of her board and as a consultant.

Her positions in administration have been vice-principal in a twinned elementary school and in a Grade 7 - 9 school and as a principal in two schools. She served as president of the newly-formed Ontario Principals Council in 1999-2000 and returned to OPC to work in the Centre for Leadership designing, developing and delivering professional development for school leaders in 2001.

New Board of Directors

Ontario ASCD Regionals

There are currently two regionals associated with the Ontario affiliate. Contact people are:

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Ontario ASCD Membership - new or renewal

Please send this form and your membership fee (\$30) to the Membership Coordinator at the address above.

Name: _____

Position: _____ School: _____

School Board:

_____ phone and e-mail:
