

Check Your Alignment!

"Check your alignment!"

"Your centre of balance is just a bit to the right"

"You seem to be having trouble with this exercise. Perhaps it is too advanced?"

"Have you been snacking too much between meals?"

Grrrr....

For those of you who have not already figured it out, I received a Wii Fit for Christmas. (Thanks, Santa, for that none too subtle hint!) For those of you who still have absolutely no idea what I am talking about, imagine an interactive video game that comes with a balance board that weighs you, tracks your centre of balance, assigns you a Wii Fit Age based on your performance, etc. and then gives you attitude in the form of a virtual "personal trainer". All of this is provided so that a person can supposedly improve levels of fitness in a number of targeted areas.

I have to confess to currently being in a love/hate relationship with my Wii (or is it my Mii?). Despite the fact that most days I feel like firing the cursed thing out the front door in a fit of frustration; for some reason, I don't. As a matter of fact, I seem drawn to it daily to see what new torture my virtual "trainer" can come up with in her attempts to "challenge me" and "help me meet my goals". (Her words, not mine – I personally think she is attempting to frustrate me while illustrating all of my inadequacies!) For example, this past Saturday, despite an already busy schedule, I actually found myself in my basement wrangling with the foolish game on two separate occasions!

What could possibly account for this newfound motivation to improve my posture? The educator in me is constantly trying to make links to classroom practice and

student learning. Call me crazy if you will, but I do see a possible link between my Wii experience and much of the current research regarding the benefits of employing Assessment for Learning strategies in our classrooms.

Assessment for Learning can loosely be defined as students and teachers using evidence of learning to adapt teaching and learning to meet immediate learning needs minute-to-minute and day-by-day (Educational Testing Services, 2009). Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black have identified five key components or strategies that must be present in order to claim that assessment for learning is being practiced. One of those five is "Providing effective feedback that moves the learner forward."

"Research has shown that effective feedback is not a discrete practice, but an integral part of an instructional dialogue between teacher and student, (or between students, or between the student and him/herself). Black and Wiliam cite three essential elements of what they term enhanced feedback:

*"~ Recognition of the desired goal,
~ Evidence about present position, and
~ Some understanding of a way to close the gap between the two."*

(Excerpt from *Providing Students with Effective Feedback* - available online at http://www.academicleadership.org/leader_action_tips/Providing_Students_with_Effective_Feedback.shtml)

If we subscribe to what research on feedback tells us, Black and Wiliam have outlined the following for us to think about:

** We ensure that the feedback we provide is positive and encouraging while taking care that it always points towards a specific action for improvement.*

** All pupils can make progress from*

where they are, based on assessment of and feedback on their last piece of work/activity.

** Pupils take responsibility for, and are active in, their own learning. They recognize their responsibility for acting on feedback given.*

** We use assessment information formatively to plan for future learning experiences.*

They also suggest that we need to ask ourselves the following questions:

** To what extent do we give pupils and staff timely feedback and provide them with information about their progress in a way that is motivating and values individual achievement?*

** To what extent does our feedback give pupils and staff a very clear sense of what they need to do to improve?*

** To what extent do we use assessment information systematically to identify learning needs and plan future learning experiences?*

Well....not sure if my Wii trainer is exactly "using evidence of learning to adapt to meet immediate learning needs minute-to-minute and day-by-day", but I have to admit I can hardly wait to get home tonight and find out if my Centre of Balance or Wii Fit Age has improved from yesterday. I have set a two-month fitness goal and I am determined to keep at it until victory is mine!!! (And...even if I don't meet my goal, all of this focus on upper body strength can only help when I eventually do heave the blasted thing out the front door and onto the yellow line!)



In fact, Bellon, Bellon, and Blank note, "Academic feedback is more strongly and consistently related to achievement than any other teaching behavior.... This relationship is consistent regardless of grade, socioeconomic status, race, or school setting.... When feedback and corrective procedures are used, most students can attain the same level of achievement as the top 20% of students."

May I Recommend?

Each of the following articles focuses on the importance of questioning, feedback, assessment and metacognition in the classroom. Should one of the titles tweak your interest, I would be happy to send it along to you!

Insufficient Questioning by Ivan Hanel (Phi Delta Kappan, November 2009)

Questioning as Thinking: A Metacognitive Framework by Nance Wilson & Linda Smetana (Middle Ground, November 2009)

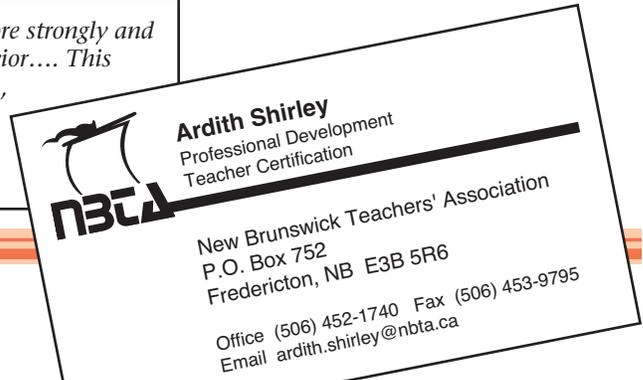
Bringing Life to Class Discussions by Rick Wormeli (Middle Ground, October 2009)

Think Time: Formative Assessment Empowers Teachers to Try New Practices by Teresa Egan, Beth Cobb and Marion Anastasia (JSD, Fall 2009)

Website of the Month:

Learning and Teaching Scotland: Assessment is for Learning

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/index.asp>



Closing Quote:

"Watching your work adopted by educators across the nation is flattering, but not if it is widely misinterpreted."

Robert Marzano
(Phi Delta Kappan, September 2009, pg. 30)

(Marzano reacts to seeing his research from *Classroom Instruction that Works* misinterpreted and misused due to overemphasis of the nine strategies. He fears that educators make mistakes when they: focus on a narrow range of strategies; assume those nine strategies must be used in every class; and assume the nine strategies will always work.)