

## CSI: NBTA Classroom Scene Investigation ♪ Who are you? Who, who? Who, who? ♪

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer - Professional Development

In case you haven't guessed by now, I could be accused of being a bit of a TV and pop culture junkie. I think one of the BEST inventions in recent years has been that of the PVR which allows me to record new episodes of all my favourite TV shows any time of the day or night, and have them waiting for me to playback and enjoy at my convenience. During one of our recent snowstorms, I found myself a bit bored, and, while avoiding more productive endeavors, sought distraction and escape. As I scrolled through the shows that I had programmed to record, it occurred to me there might be a bit of a pattern. Multiple CSIs, several episodes of Law and Order and a recent addition to my list – Republic of Doyle. While the latter is perhaps a more comedic form of detective/crime scene investigator show, I quite enjoy the laughs as well as the Canadian content (OK, OK - I may have a bit of a crush on Alan Hawco as well, but I digress...).

As I consider my interest in the genre, it occurs to me that many comparisons could be made between teaching and the world of detectives and crime scene investigators. While this may be a bit of a stretch for some, please bear with me.

As teachers, we begin each September with several new cases assigned to us in the form of students. While there may be many similarities between the cases we encounter over our careers, we understand that each "case" is unique and must be treated



accordingly. Each day, we carefully collect clues in our classrooms. Experience has taught us that any one of these clues could be just the piece of evidence needed to prove that learning has occurred, or to unlock the mystery of why it may not have occurred to date. We appreciate that even the most inconsequential can have meaning when reviewed later, and, therefore, careful documentation of all of the evidence is key.

One of the mistakes that investigators can make is relying too heavily on one particular kind of evidence. While the eye witness observation or DNA analysis may be tempting to submit as all the proof required, an experienced investigator always looks for at least 3 different pieces of evidence to prove the case beyond a shadow of a doubt. Investigators that rely too heavily on their "gut" or the "obvious" may find themselves on the wrong track. After all, many have erred by making assumptions and developing foregone conclusions based on DNA, past

experience or precedent. (Her brother couldn't put two and two together – we can't expect her to be good at Math!) Sadly and despite our best efforts, more than one innocent person has spent time in a detention centre! Hence, the importance of our investigative work is underscored and we know that it is essential that we leave no stone unturned.

As educators, we realize that while one episode of a TV mystery has the luxury of being able to focus on a single case, our beat involves working many cases at once. While this is our reality, we also know that for the families involved with our cases, theirs is always most important and we are mindful of this in all of our communications and briefings to them.

Like investigators, each of us has our own specialty and area of expertise. We know that when we are assigned a really tough or complex case, it is always advantageous to work with a team. We also understand that sometimes when a team has worked long and hard on a case and it has gone "cold", there is merit to bringing in fresh eyes to review documentation and evidence.

Whether our individual detective styles be that of a Horatio Cane, Jessica Fletcher, Columbo, Perry Mason, Nancy Drew or Jake Doyle, our ultimate goal is the same – to prove (and in turn improve) the outcome of each of the cases in which we come into contact.

**Mark Your Calendar!**  
**Council Day 2011, Friday, May 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**Elementary & Music Specialist Strand – Fredericton**  
**Middle Level & Art Specialist Strand – Saint John**  
**High School & Phys. Ed. Specialist Strand – Miramichi**

## May I Recommend?

Two articles from the November issue of *Educational Leadership* that I quite enjoyed reading were: “**The Myth of Pink and Blue Brains**” by Lise Elliott and “**Gender-Friendly Schools**” by Kelley King, Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens. As many of you may have guessed, I like to have my thinking challenged, and just when the first article convinced me to “abandon the notion of a male and female brain” the other convinced that there just might be something to the idea. In the end, I do think we could all agree that the three strategies suggested in the latter article are solid strategies for all students: 1. Add Movement; 2. Build on the Visual and; 3. Incorporate Student Interests and Choices.

*Middle Ground*, is a journal that is produced by the National Middle School Association. One of their regular columns is titled “Spotlight on Literacy”. The October edition highlights “**Variations on Round Robin Reading**” and explores some more creative and engaging options for teachers who are looking for more collaborative approaches to reading and learning that also promote understanding of the content. Some of the options presented include: Imitative Reading, Whisper Reading, Choral Reading and Close Procedure Oral Reading (I would be happy to send a copy of the feature to anyone who wants to know more about any of these strategies).

The November issue of the *Middle School Journal* includes an article by Michael J. Donhost titled “**Data-Driven Decision Making**”. To any of you who may have been exposed to one of my recent tirades on the overuse and bastardization of the term “data” within education, let me assure you that while it pains me to include the word in my Growing, Living and Learning column, I am hopeful that the thinking this article invokes will make the sacrifice worth while. For those of you who have managed to escape my banter on the topic allow me to explain with a bit of background: I have recently began a campaign to have the word “data” deleted from the educators lexicon. My presentations and documents have been carefully scoured and I am pleased to report that any reference to “data” has been replaced by the word “evidence”. While I fully acknowledge that this may be another one of my own personal hang-ups with vocabulary, I find the word “data” both overwhelming and limiting all at once. In my humble opinion, the recent hyperfocus on “data-driven decisions” has the potential to lead educators down a garden path that could be just as **damaging** as decisions made with little or no data - and that is using only one kind of evidence – test scores – and usually only standardized ones. While I concur these should be **considered**, every school, classroom and student is surrounded by a plethora of “evidence of learning” that also needs to be considered including student portfolios, attendance,

journal entries, behaviour logs, interest inventories, circulation statistics from the local library, graduation rates, enrollment in post secondary programs of recent graduates, etc.

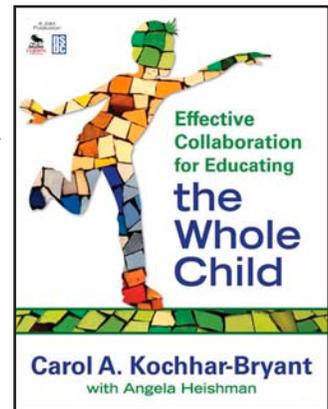
I enjoyed this particular article because it acknowledges that too much evidence can be distracting and suggests that many schools get lost in the data because they begin by simply collecting reams of it without taking into account, and planning for, the complex process of evidence-based decision making and all it entails. The author suggests that there are five phases of decision making that need to be planned for: organizing for success, building assessment literacy, identifying data sources, aligning data systems, and then finally - altering instruction.

## Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to the winner of last months’ book “**The Teacher as Assessment Leader**” edited by Tom Guskey - Nancy McPhee of Harbour View High School in Saint John - and thanks to all of you who responded.

This month we are giving away “**Effective Collaboration for Educating the Whole Child**” by Carol A. Knochlar-Bryant.

In order to have a chance to win, simply drop me an email at the email address below before **February 25<sup>th</sup>** with the subject line – **Book Give Away**.



## Closing Quote:

*“Wisdom is not acquired save as the result of investigation.”*

Sara Teasdale

## Website of the Month:

This month may I suggest a little clip on you tube called “Lost Generation” that was shared with me by a colleague. Really enjoyed the “reverse” of it Hope you do to..

**[www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA)**