

Lenses, Telescopes, Magnifying Glasses and Mirrors

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer - Professional Development

Over the past summer, almost 300 teachers from around the province have come together to learn at one of several events hosted by NBTA. While each of the venues may have been unique (NBTF Building, Mount Allison, UNBSJ, St. Thomas or Cap-Pelé), and the purpose for their converging may have been distinct (POINT, DSS, CONTACT, NBTA Leadership or NBTA Executive Orientation), no matter the venue or intended purpose for the gathering of educators, common themes evolved. Together as professionals, we looked through lenses, telescopes, magnifying glasses and mirrors as we examined the actions required of each of us to improve ourselves, our schools, our Association, our profession and the New Brunswick Education System.

As I “reflect” (Yikes - that mirror again!) on my own learning this summer, it strikes me that I wish I could pack a proverbial “tool kit” for every teacher as they start the school year. Let me explain a bit further:

1. Lenses – Using the “lens” of a recently retired Ombudsman and Child & Youth Advocate, Bernard Richard spoke to CONTACT delegates about the perspective of our most vulnerable children and youth and their families. Andy Scott, using the lens as cochair of the Learning: Everybody’s Project NB Public Engagement, reminded teacher leaders from around NB that one of the greatest challenges he foresees will be engaging a graying NB public that investment in education is more important than health care. Our new NBTA President, Heather Smith, shared with participants at all of these events the challenges that she sees over her two-year mandate and beyond.

As teachers around the province begin, I believe the “lenses” in our tool kit can be a constant reminder

to us that our view of the world is not the same as anyone else’s. The “lens” from which we view the world is as unique to us as our fingerprints. I believe that being mindful of this during the millions of interactions we will have with our students, their parents and our colleagues over the course of this school year will prove invaluable in our lesson plans and general communications.

2. Telescope – A tool that conjures images of historical navigators like Samuel de Champlain or Christopher Columbus. Sometimes, it’s used to see the more distant or perhaps “bigger” pictures. As teachers, the telescope in our educational tool kit reminds us to look wayyyyy ahead as we plan for learning. What skills do the children in our classrooms need today to help prepare them for tomorrow’s challenges? What will those challenges be?

The telescope can also be a great reminder when it comes to lesson planning. Using your telescope to see where you want to end up is a great reminder to “Begin with the end in Mind” (Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) as you plan or as Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins suggest, “Backward Design” (*Understanding by Design*, 2005).

Backward Design Process
The design process involves teachers planning in 3 stages, each with a focusing question:

Stage 1 - What is worthy and requiring of understanding?

Stage 2 - What is evidence of understanding?

Stage 3 - What learning experiences and teaching promote understanding, interest and excellence?

McTighe & Wiggins (2005)

The Backward Design Process can help prevent what I call “Alice in Wonderland” syndrome (see quote on next page) or even the “Julie Andrew’s Approach” to lesson design. (For those who haven’t heard this one before let me remind you of the famous song “A Few of my Favourite Things” from *The Sound of Music*.)

3. Magnifying glass – Like Sherlock Holmes, teachers are constantly searching for “evidence” that proves to them that learning has taken place. As well, they look for “clues” that help them figure out the mystery of how each child learns best. The magnifying glass reminds us to constantly examine all aspects of every “case” presented to us this year and not merely be satisfied with our “first impressions”.



4. Mirror – Perhaps the scariest of all the tools in our educational tool kit is the mirror. This is the tool that forces us to reflect on our practice and ourselves. With each challenge we face, looking in the mirror to recognize the “lens” we might be wearing, or even how our own learning styles or interpersonal styles may be impacting the situation is important. Professional self-reflection is a requisite skill. (It can also be one of the most humbling of experiences.)

As you begin the 2011-12 school year, I wish each of you great success and both personal and professional satisfaction. I know you will use all of those tools in your kit wisely.

May I Recommend?

“**Making realfriends**” by Dr. Steven Van Zoost (*Aviso*, Spring 2011) details the CTF Imagineaction Project that Dr. Van Zoost and his Grade 12 English Class at Avon View High School in Nova Scotia embarked on as a result of a classroom conversation that began when his students asked if he was on Facebook and he flippantly replied, “No, I have real friends.”

“**Lesson Study Puts a Collaborative Lens on Student Learning**” (*Tools for Schools*, ASCD, Summer 2011) I highly recommend based on the three templates (What Does the Teacher Ask?, How do the Students Respond? and Who’s Talking and When?) that provide excellent observation and recording charts that two colleagues could use to encourage professional conversation and reflection on their questioning techniques.

“**Mirror Mirror on the Wall**” by Gisele Poirier (*In the Middle*, SMYA, 2010) highlights the efforts of this Middle Level teacher to instill confidence and self-esteem in her students through a “mirror” (a.k.a. her classroom door covered in tin foil) activity as they exited her classroom each day.

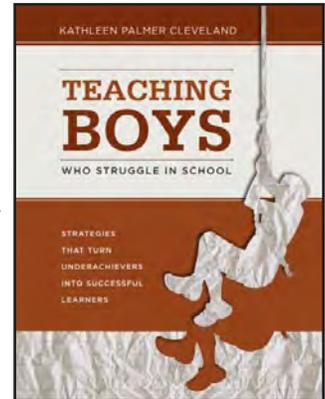
“**Teacherpreneur: A More Powerful Vision for the Teaching Profession**” by Barnett Berry (*Kappan*, March 2011) I recognize that this article may require the use of our telescopes as it is adapted from “*Teaching 2030: What We Must Do for Our Students and Our Schools*”. In predicting the future of the teaching profession, Berry suggests that teaching and learning in the 21st Century will require three things that aren’t on many reform agendas:

- Teachers who are more skilled in the art and science of teaching than ever before;
- Teachers who embrace their role as leaders of school improvement; and
- Teachers who have and use a strong collective voice to ensure that the needs of all their students are adaptively met.

Book Give-Away!

This month, we are pleased to offer: “**Teaching Boys Who Struggle in School**” by Kathleen Palmer Cleveland.

In order to have a chance to win, simply drop me an email at the email address below before **Friday, October 7th** with the subject line – Book Give-Away.



Ardith



Website of the Month:

Check it out:

Jay McTighe gives an overview of what he and Grant Wiggins mean by “Backward Design”.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIS3-8-QPqo

Closing Quote:

- Alice** Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?
- The Cat** That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.
- Alice** I don’t much care where...so long as I get somewhere.
- The Cat** Then it doesn’t much matter which way you go.

— Alice in Wonderland