

## Looking Forward • Looking Back *a SmartLearning* update.....May 2009

Thank you for your interest in *SmartLearning*. Looking Forward • Looking Back was chosen as a theme for this update to give subscribers a window into what has been planned for SmartLearning trainings over the next ten months, and to give subscribers reflections and resources flowing from some recent events:

- November 2-3, 2008 *SmartLearning* conference, Motivating Minds, a framework and tools for Smarter Learning -- an overview of the conference and reflections gathered from delegates
- January 7, 2009 workshop presentation at the Hawaiian International Education Conference -- [a link to the paper prepared as a conference submission](#)
- February 11, 2009 Intermediate SmartLearning Round situated in Tammy Kay's grade four classroom in Penticton, B.C. – includes reflections from participants, A Leaders' Guide for a SmartLearning Round, and the Principles of Learning research lens often used to guide observations during SmartLearning rounds

## LOOKING FORWARD

Many different kinds of *SmartLearning* interactions take us well into 2010. Two major events, a ***SmartLearning Summer Institute*** hosted by SD27, Cariboo Chilcotin **Aug.31-Sept.2** at the **108 Mile Resort and Conference Centre** and a ***Smart Learning Conference*** in **Vancouver** at the Sheraton Plaza 500 **October 2-3.**, are in the final planning stages. Information and registration details are now on the website at <http://www.susanclose.ca>

Both the summer institute and the early fall conference will bring people together to learn, deepen and extend their understandings of *SmartLearning*. We know when it comes to learning that "...collective genius does not just happen; methods matter" and we know that... "None of us is as smart as all of us together (Bennis, 1997)." Everyone learns so much when we gather for a time, and immerse ourselves in SmartLearning practices. The practices have been developed and refined through cycles of action research to deeply engage learners, activate and balance brain processing, and to truly differentiate learning.

We are pleased to announce that **the integration of the *SmartLearning* approach** with **Smart Board technologies** will featured at the **summer institute** and at the **fall conference**. Sherry Olson, a grade seven teacher from the Cowichan Valley School District will model how she integrates the strategic thinking and the tools found in the SmartLearning approach with the technology. Sherry played a vital role in the multi-district *Learning for Success Research* project many years ago – a study that led to the development of the SmartLearning Framework. Sherry is also a Smart Board facilitator. People interested in technological applications are in for a real treat.



## Upcoming *SmartLearning* Events

May 5, 2009 (Tue).....Smithers, BC

**Education Forum: presentation to the Board of Education showcasing some preliminary effects of SmartLearning, led by leaders in SD27**

May 6, 2009 (Wed).....Smithers, BC

**Motivating Minds with SmartLearning... in the Intermediate Grades**  
**The Power of SmartLearning: a kick-off session for the 2008-2009 Intermediate SmartLearning Rounds co-led by Susan Close and Ann Nottingham**

June 1 (Mon).....Douglas College New Westminster, BC

**Motivating Minds: Applying what we know about the brain and learning**  
**A Full day Faculty Focus on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning co-led by Susan Close and Georgia Nieken**

August 31-Sept 2 (Mon-Wed).....108 Mile House, BC

**Motivating Minds: a framework and tools for differentiating learning and igniting brainpower**  
**A three-day K-12 *SmartLearning* Institute designed to create the conditions for powerful learning - hosted by SD27, Cariboo Chilcotin, and co-led by Susan Close and a provincial team of SmartLearning facilitators**

\*Conference and registration details at [www.susanclose.ca](http://www.susanclose.ca) **Early bird** rates for individuals, teams, student and first year teachers. Register early, **spaces for 200.**

Sept 2 (Wed).....Penticton, BC

**Smart Learning for Student Success: Activating, Engaging and Motivating Minds**  
**A one-day session designed to showcase effective and engaging learning strategies that differentiate instruction regardless of the content area, co-led by Ingrid Fawcett and Petra Egart**

Sept25 (Fri).....Inuvik, NT

**Differentiating with the SmartLearning Approach**  
**Two conference sessions for K-9 and K-12 educators led by Susan Close**

Sept28-30 (Mon-Wed)

**SmartLearning in Action**  
**Learning Rounds in Inuvik classrooms led by Susan Close**

Oct 2-3 (Fri-Sat).....Vancouver, BC

**Motivating Minds with SmartLearning Conference: getting started and going deeper with practices that ignite brain power and differentiate learning**

A two-day K-12+ conference featuring a highly motivating framework and engaging learning strategies -- SmartThinking Tools -- that help educators activate thinking, differentiate instruction, and inspire learning; co-led by Susan Close and a provincial team of SmartLearning facilitators. One feature session will showcase how to integrate the SmartLearning approach with the Smart Board technologies; another will show how to use visual thinking to deepen and extend understanding.

\*For conference and registration details go to [www.susanclose.ca](http://www.susanclose.ca) .

**Early bird rates** for individuals, teams, first year and student teachers. **Register early, limit 200**

Oct 23 (Fri).....Vancouver, BC

**Using talk structures to stimulate questioning, inference-making, reflective thinking and ownership for learning**

An NCTE conference presentation co-led by Susan Close, Ingrid Fawcett, and Tammy Renyard

\*Conference and registration details will be posted on the BCTF website in May 2009: [www.bctf/bctela/](http://www.bctf/bctela/).

Oct 23 (Fri).....Richmond, BC

**Using Partner-talk to Ignite Brain Power: Richer Thinking with SmartLearning**

A Teacher Librarian Conference “*Champions of Literacy*” presentation co-led by Susan Close and Ann Nottingham

\*Conference and registration details will be posted on the BCTF website.

Oct 24 (Sat).....Richmond, BC

**Asking the Right Questions: Creating Thoughtful Learners**

An NCTE one-day institute focusing on: developing critical literacy through oral language, conducting literary conversations that include all learners, using brain research to stimulate powerful learning, and increasing the students’ role in accessing and using feedback; co-led by Sharon Jeroski, Faye Brownlie, Susan Close and Kathleen Gregory

\*Conference and registration details will be posted on the BCTF website in May 2009.

Feb7, 2010 (Sun)..... Comox, BC

**Smarter Learning: powerful ways to fuel thinking and ignite brainpower... at any age**  
An evening with parents presented by Susan Close

Feb8, 2010 (Mon)..... Comox, BC

**Motivating Minds: a framework and tools for smarter learning**

A keynote address followed by in-depth workshops presented by Susan Close

# LOOKING BACK

## 1. Highlights from the Nov.2-3, 2008 Motivating Minds Conference ... held at the Metrotown Hilton in Burnaby B.C.

Over two hundred K-12 educators from districts and jurisdictions in BC and Alberta joined us for the November 2-3, 2008 ***Motivating Minds: a framework and tools for Smarter Learning Conference***. The lovely balance of people new to SmartLearning and people experienced with the approach, and the balance of enrolling and non-enrolling educators representing primary, intermediate/middle and secondary- from public and private schools - allowed for vibrant professional conversations about student learning.

Brain science findings provided lenses for examining the refined *SmartLearning* framework and the array of *SmartThinking* tools. From our continual study of the effects of the SmartLearning approach on achievement, and the continual study of the literature, we learned that "...stimulating equal activity in both brain hemispheres creates pathways to better learning (Siegel, 2007; Taylor, 2007; Close, 2009). A new chart, *Pathways for Better Learning*, and new sets of coaching cards, *Coaching with Brain Activity in Mind* were introduced -- one version for Intermediate/Secondary and another for Primary.

Through the connecting phase of the SmartLearning process we have always worked to develop students into a community of learners, and that is now explicitly reflected in the refined framework. Explicit planning for and monitoring of reflective thinking, social interaction, movement, and the balancing of brain activity -- all visible components of the newly refined framework -- took everyone's learning to a new level. This new chart is being prepared in poster size for the upcoming Aug.31-Sept.2 summer institute, and for the Oct.2-3, 2009 conference.

Thank you so much to Megan Anakin, Kim Bondi, Barb Morris, Ingrid Fawcett, Nadine Naughton, Georgia Nieken, Ann Nottingham, Joey Sahli, and Erika Warkentin, for work and feedback on the new SmartLearning Framework poster and planning guide. What a treat it was to present each conference participant with a coloured mini-poster version of the framework and planning guide, and a wall-sized poster to take back to their schools.

Conference reflections demonstrate the power of a *SmartLearning* conference – a coming together of people wanting to learn and implement practices that truly make a difference to all learners. Below are a few conference reflections.\*

The feedback showed clearly what delegates were learning, what they appreciated, insights they were gaining and connections they were making:

- *SmartLearning makes sense. The approach is kind and gentle, yet demands participation.*

- *I realize that a book or text can be taught any number of ways depending on the outcomes being developed and the skill focus. I would like to see a set of tasks to go with each of the important skills. The tasks are really important 'ends' to teach toward. A set of examples for grade groupings would be fantastic.*
- *The SmartLearning tools I've learned about, particularly the A/B partner-talk, lend themselves beautifully to differentiating the learning.*
- *Teaching the students to be aware of the how the brain works seems vital. The new tools will really help me to do this.*
- *I noticed that there is a natural flow to the strategies that puts the emphasis on the learning and the learner; a student cannot be a passive learner in a SmartLearning classroom because of the responsibility to classmates, the intrinsic interest, and the solvable challenges.*
- *I like the "coaching cards" and the extensive ways to enhance oral language.*
- *SmartLearning encompasses all aspects of the new English Language IRPs. I'm using it for oral language! What a bonus to have performance scales to go with the outcomes. THANK YOU Ann Nottingham.*
- *I feel confident to begin teaching the SmartLearning sequence on Tuesday morning. I will go slowly and be sure to set very clear goals.*
- *Today I noticed I am becoming more confident with the SmartLearning framework and some of the tools. When I started SmartLearning four years ago, I often felt overwhelmed. Now I feel inspired, and I'm eager to get back to my school district to share some of my new understandings with my colleagues.*
- *The more I hear, the more inspired and encouraged I get!" My 'aha!' ...have a balance between left and right brain activities.*
- *I noticed I know more about SmartLearning processes than I thought, and my confidence has been boosted. Thanks!*
- *Movement was more important than I thought – something which is difficult for me personally but really useful to engage my students. Loved the Hamlet example...*
- *I was very pleased to learn how easy and how low prep some tools are, **and** how effective they can be. What an extraordinary morning! As an educator I am always pleased when I attend a conference where what I learn today can be used in my classroom tomorrow. I am excited about my upcoming week.*
- *I can see how SmartLearning can promote both receptive and expressive language usage by helping students develop both their spoken and written language through the use of the SmartLearning coaching cards.*
- *I need to purposefully consider activating both sides of the brain when I am planning... specific teaching about thinking in visual images and thinking with language.*
- *Love the connections created with graphically representing the understandings of Social Studies, especially given the pervasiveness of government in the curriculum. Thanks!*
- *I realize that a book can be taught any number of ways depending on the skill focus. I would like a set of tasks to go with each important skill.*

Thank you to everyone who took the time to document their thoughts. A full set of reflections can be accessed at: [http://www.smartlearning.ca/smart\\_learning\\_reflections.shtml](http://www.smartlearning.ca/smart_learning_reflections.shtml). Look for Reflections and new ideas from the Motivating Minds Conference Nov.2-3, 2009.

Suggestions offered have been folded into plans for the August 31-Sept. 2 SmartLearning Summer Institute, and into the October 2-3, 2009 Motivating Minds with SmartLearning Conference:

- One suggestion we heard from a number of delegates was the need for our events to be scent free. **Scent-free** will be on our advertising and registration forms from now on.
- People really appreciated the round-table analysis and planning session that we offered as a trial on the second day of the conference. They requested that we build similar sessions into each day of a conference or summer institute.

## **2. SmartLearning goes to Hawaii: Hawaiian International Education Conference January 7, 2009**

Georgia Nieken and I had the privilege of presenting a workshop at the Hawaiian International Education Conference in Honolulu on January 7<sup>th</sup>. Kathy Au the new president of the International Reading Association presented a keynote address outlining findings from a research project designed to improve literacy achievement in Hawaii and Chicago. The findings were very encouraging to us as they reflected what we have been seeing in our SmartLearning classrooms for a number of years: all learners' literacy skills develop in inclusive environments that offer instruction that is responsive to the needs. A paper submitted as a backgrounder for our session called, *Motivating Minds with SmartLearning: Driven by Questions, Inspired by Findings – one district's strategy to improve literacy achievement and inform professional practice*, can be accessed on the website at <http://smartlearning.ca/articles.shtml>

## **3. A SmartLearning Round situated in a grade four classroom**

At the Motivating Minds conference a host of leaders attended *The Power of SmartLearning Rounds* session. SmartLearning Rounds provide opportunities for teams of educators to see SmartLearning in action. They are situated in schools, much like doctors' grand rounds are situated in hospitals. *A Leaders' Guide to SmartLearning Rounds* was presented to the participants as a powerful implementation model -- situated in the place of most opportunity to learn about learning, the classroom. The guide was developed over the past few years through cycles of learning rounds conducted throughout the province. A glimpse of the approach was featured a number of years ago in one of the Deputy Minister's Reports on Education. You can access the article in Resources on the website.

During SmartLearning Rounds participants have to opportunity to engage in planning, co-teaching and reflecting on learning. They apply research lenses as they observe SmartLearning in action. Applying the lenses helps them deeply notice critical aspects of the learning. One lens we use outlines the four principles of learning featured in all BC curriculum documents: active learning, collaborative learning, learner responsibility and learning about learning. Leaders attending learning rounds often mention that the teachers they work with want to learn more about actively engaging learners, how to structure and develop collaborative learning, how to

help learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning, and how to support learners to learn about learning itself – aspects that are clearly evident in the *SmartLearning* approach. The reflections below give you a sense of the power coming from professional interactions of this kind. For a full set of reflections go to

[http://www.smartlearning.ca/smart\\_learning\\_reflections.shtml](http://www.smartlearning.ca/smart_learning_reflections.shtml) and look for *Reflections from the February 11, 2009 SmartLearning Round*. Included with the reflections is the Leaders' Guide for a SmartLearning Round and the Principles of Learning research lens we use to guide observations during the rounds.

## **A Sampling of SmartLearning Round Reflections**

From a SmartLearning Round set in Tammy Kay's grade four classroom, in Penticton

Interactions were co-led by Tammy Kay, Scott Edwards and Susan Close

Participants were invited to reflect on the effects of the SmartLearning Round on them as educators and on the student learning. A number of student teachers joined the full day of interactions:

- This class makes me feel confident that I have the tools to 'do' SmartLearning on my own. I feel support from all of the others that are leading or involved in any way. I feel satisfied that the work I am doing in my classroom is important. Although I know I can improve and develop in some areas, I am successful and my kids are progressing very well. I noticed that students seem to feel relaxed and confident with their ideas in an atmosphere where they feel appreciated. There was a sense of community in the room. They were able to grasp new concepts through work with the vault of tools that visibly varied and balanced right and left brain activity. They seemed to understand why they were doing what they were doing. Active purpose was evident. The process of SmartLearning presses students to transfer learning to their own lives.
- The 'writes' that came out of today's learning round are proof that SmartLearning can reach and challenge all learners. This is even more powerful now that we know the makeup of the class and how many challenges the students face. I really liked having Tammy explain the makeup of the class and the range of skill levels. I would not have believed learning like this was possible with learners with such a range of needs. Every student is given an opportunity to show what they know, and to achieve and feel good about their learning. When students feel good about their work, they become more confident and become more willing to take risks.
- There is such powerful learning happening in Mrs. Kay's grade four classroom. One area that I really noticed was the goal setting that each student did. The goals they pick were relevant to the task at hand and really furthered their learning. One particular boy demonstrated this by making a goal to pull his weight in the group. He followed through with his goal which helped further his group's work. I could see his real sense of accomplishment for completing his goal of helping the group. Some students were invited to stand and share what they had written so far, a little while into the individual writing. This acknowledged the individual writer and gave each

one an opportunity to hear what was written while giving the rest of the class opportunities to hear different ways of expressing ideas. It also helped affirm each writer and gave each one confidence to continue working to make the words say what they wanted them to say. Having students stand to speak got them moving, and let any restlessness drift away. The teachers continually restated the goals as students worked. This coaching kept the students on track; everyone knew what they were doing. Everyone was focused and their pens and pencils were continually moving. What an inspiring sight!

## Next steps...

Our approach continues to be fuelled by questions: What makes the biggest difference to student learning? How can a learning situation release the full mental capacities of all learners and help them to learn and retain complex skills (adapted from Langer, 1997)? How do we motivate minds, ignite brainpower and truly differentiate learning?

We feel very privileged to be working side-by-side with so many teams of educators, all learning from their implementation work with SmartLearning. As we learn from studying the effects of SmartLearning on achievement, and from our continual study of the literature, nuances are added to the system of practice. Sharing our insights and stories is critical to our learning. If you have an insight, an innovation, a compelling story, a resource or link to share, a question you are mulling over... please email it to me at [susan@susanclose.ca](mailto:susan@susanclose.ca). People in the *SmartLearning* network would love to know how your work with SmartLearning is going... your successes, challenges, solutions, insights, and hard questions...

We hope to see you at the [August 31-Sept.2 SmartLearning Summer institute](#) at the **108 Mile Resort and Conference Centre** in the Cariboo Chilcotin, and at the [October 2-3 in-depth Motivating Minds with SmartLearning Conference at the Sheraton Plaza 500 in Vancouver](#). Look for summer institute details and registration forms on the [Coming Events](#) page. Fall conference details and registration forms will be posted on the website in mid-May.

Early bird rates for both events will give everyone opportunities for discounts. Come as a team that registers and pays together, and you save even more. Make sure first year teachers and student teachers hear about the events. They get to come at greatly reduced rates.

## Thanks for your interest in SmartLearning

If you have any questions or need any information, just [send us an email](#).

Fondly, Susan Close