

## A Word from our President

Nancy Patton

I'm excited! It's finally turning green in Minnesota, and with this new awakening, I'm finding myself rejuvenated and looking forward. Forward to what you might ask? Well, the end of a challenging term, the opportunity to take some time away from classes and actually plan with thought versus survival mode, and the opportunity to give shape to the Fall Conference.

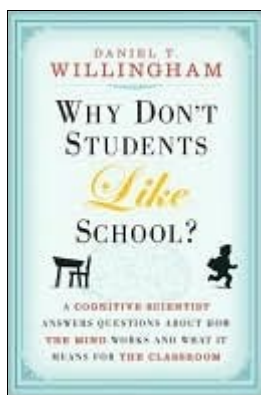
I find the brain fascinating and have been hooked on the many mysteries of how it works since taking Physiology of Psychology as part of my BA degree. That has been more years ago than I wish to divulge, but just let me share with you that there has always been a lot we didn't know about the brain, plus new mysteries about the working brain that we've yet to figure out. Over the years, theories on the brain have been disproved and new ones have been made. The workings and intricacies of the brain are still being explored and there are many interpretations of how this amazing organ works. The implications of unraveling the mysteries of the brain for educators are numerous and I look forward to a conference this fall that promotes brain based learning and educating.

The spring 2009 *American Educator*, Vol. 33, No. 1, caught my eye with its cover of a brain with students sitting upon it in various poses and engaged in various activities. The title: *Why Don't Students Like School? Because the Mind is Not Designed for Thinking* just begged to be read. It's authored by Daniel T. Willingham, who authored the book, *Why Don't Students Like School? Two thoughts from the article, among many, stood out to me as a developmental educator and as a teacher.*

1) We often aim for teaching our students critical thinking, but critical thinking involves the use of memory, not just reasoning. As a result, one can't teach reasoning if memory is not adequate. Memory is two-fold in this case: practice with critical thinking, or reasoning, but more importantly the basic background of knowledge that aids higher thinking. For example, when you're faced with a dilemma or problem, it is more often your memory of how you solved previous problems or made decisions that guides you, and not critical thinking. So, past experiences stored as memory are more powerful, or more readily used, than thinking exercises or steps. I often equate what I do in developmental education as the *Head Start* for college. I'm constantly amazed by what students do not know and this is a reminder to value teaching content and general knowledge.

2) Keep a diary. It's hard to find activities for students that engage thinking and that are not too easy, and the same time not so difficult that they give up and don't put forth a mental effort. When you find these sessions, portions of lessons, or experiences that really work – write them down. I am guilty of never keeping a diary or journal, despite the fact that I promote them to students! However, I recently had a very rewarding experience with my most challenging and least prepared group of students. It was the culmination of teaching the reading of different perspectives and several of my students stated that they finally got it! They finally experienced what I had been trying for weeks for them to learn and they told me specifically what made it real this time and it even included my reconfiguration of the room. Now, you've all had those moments, but have you written them down? Could you further develop them? Could you share them with others? Could you present your small, or big, ah-ha moment at the Fall Conference?

Doing a break-out session for the September 2009 Conference, does not require a scientific knowledge of the brain. It just requires that you share with others something that works; an activity that effectively gets an unprepared math, or writing, or reading, student to engage, to learn, to participate. A teachable moment you've had that gets a student to think about the world they're in and what they can do, and what they have yet to learn. So, keep or start that diary and share it with you fellow comrades in developmental education. Respond to the Call for Proposals.



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## MNADE Listserv

Melissa O'Connor manages the MNADE Listserv. If you would like to join, please e-mail her directly.

[Melissa.oconnor@minneapolis.edu](mailto:Melissa.oconnor@minneapolis.edu)

## MNADE Remembers Ruth Gessner

Laurel Watt

I'm sorry to report the passing of Ruth Gessner on February 8. Ruth was the Director of the Communications Learning Lab (since renamed the Learning Center) at Inver Hills from its inception during the 1970's until her retirement in 1993. Some of you will remember her from the days when MNADE was MODE. Ruth was at Inver Hills when the college began to welcome Southeast Asian students in the early 80's. When I first met Ruth in the fall of 1983, I had come to Inver Hills to interview for a job as a tutor. I walked into a large room that was swarming with students waiting for tutors, and Ruth was in the midst of it all, trying to match many students to a small group of tutors. She asked me to wait a bit while she tended to things and said, "Why don't you just sit down with these students here and see if they have questions." I worked with them for about 45 minutes until she could finally get free, and then the only place we could find to sit down for my interview was at the end of the hall on a bench. During this somewhat unusual interview, I somehow talked myself into a job, and thanks to her mentoring and encouragement over the next few years, I went back to graduate school and later began the teaching career that I enjoy today.

Ruth taught study skills at Inver Hills for many years, and her work with both developmental and college-level writers gave birth to our campus Writing Center. She supported many returning adult students, empathizing with their fears because she also had experienced the nerves that accompany a return to college after several years at home raising children. Shortly before her retirement, Ruth also established our Peer Tutoring program.

As for her hobbies, the whole campus knew her to be an avid reader, and she could complete the New York Times crossword puzzle in about fifteen minutes—in ink. She loved music and attending garage sales. She even joked about hiring one of our best lab assistants after meeting her at a local garage sale. To know Ruth was to feel her warmth and generosity, and many of our former students remember annual picnics at her home near the campus. She also acquired lots of Hmong handwork over the years when students brought their relatives' delicately hand-stitched ornaments and Pan Dau to campus to sell.

A story I love to tell about Ruth concerns one of those ornaments. Every December, Ruth put up a little Christmas tree. It was covered with handmade Hmong Christmas ornaments. The students whose mothers and aunts made these would bring in bags of them to sell. I used to give Ruth a lot of grief about her ability to get her hands on all the best ones. One day in early December I came back from teaching a class and found a new one hanging on the tree. It was a little pillow ornament with a cross stitched inside a heart. It was one of a kind. I teased her mercilessly about getting all the good ornaments while I was slaving away in the classroom. Later that month, a few days before Christmas, I received a suspicious package in the mail. The return address was S.C., North Pole. Inside was the ornament wrapped inside a piece of paper on which the words were written, "Thou Shall Not Covet."

This memory always reminds me of two of Ruth's best qualities: her generosity and sense of humor. The sight of that ornament when I unpack the tree decorations each year never fails to remind me of the sparkle in her eyes and her robust laugh.

Ruth is survived by her husband Art, who was Inver Hills' first president, their children Anne, Beth, and John, and six grandchildren. An endowed scholarship in her memory is being established at Inver Hills.

Laurel Watt

## Call for Proposals

Victoria Williams

**Thursday-Friday, September 24-25, 2009, at the Kahler Grand Hotel, in Rochester, MN**

The Executive Board of MNADE invites proposals for the 16<sup>th</sup> annual conference. This year's conference theme will focus on engaging and empowering student minds through the understanding of their cognitive development as indicated by research. In particular, the conference will help participants apply brain-based knowledge to develop teaching strategies that most effectively aid developmental students in transitioning from high school to college, university, and technical programs, or in moving from dependent to independent models. A major objective of the conference will be to share teaching techniques for active and applied learning that promote student engagement based on students' cognitive development.

Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Sheryl Feinstein, Associate Professor, at Augustana College, Sioux Falls, SD. Sheryl is the author of the book, *Secrets of the Teenage Brain: Research-Based Strategies for Reaching & Teaching Today's Adolescents* (2004). She is also the editor and co-author of *The Praeger Handbook of Learning and the Brain: Two Volumes* (2006), and authored *Parenting the Teenage Brain: Understanding a Work in Progress, Teaching the At-Risk Teenage Brain*, and, *Learning and the Brain: A comprehensive Guide for Educators, Parents, and Teachers* (2007). She has recently completed a Fulbright Scholarship to Tanzania and consults at a correctional facility for adolescent boys and at a separate site for Emotionally/Behaviorally Disturbed (EBD) adolescents in Minnesota. Her speaking vita is extensive, including many international presentations.

As you reflect on what you and/or your campus colleagues have to share on various aspects of active and brain-based learning, please consider:

- successful transitional programs.
- departmental and/or college-wide projects and initiatives related to active, or brain-based, learning.
- collaborative resources that enhance student success and retention.
- lessons that you have used in your courses that promote students' engagement and active learning.

In other words, we are interested in hearing about any efforts to promote developmental education students' engagement through active, applied, or brain-based learning.

**Proposals should include names of presenters, a primary contact person (including phone, address, and e-mail), session title, a brief description of the proposed presentation (100 words maximum), and short two-three sentence presenter biographies suitable for submission in the conference program. Please indicate your audiovisual needs; both types of projectors are on-site, but we recommend that presenters bring their own laptops.**

Send to:

**Victoria Williams, MNADE President-Elect**

[vlwilliams@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:vlwilliams@stcloudstate.edu) (preferred method of delivery) or mail to:

1107 35<sup>th</sup> Ave. N, St. Cloud, MN 56303

Direct questions to the above email address or call: 320-492-1251

**Priority due date: June 15, 2009    Proposal close date: July 15, 2009**

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## Making Connections Between ABE and DE

Kimberly Johnson

As educators we know that changes in the world economy, including the call for growth in “green jobs,” require workers with education levels beyond the high school diploma. In fact, national and statewide projections indicate that the fastest-growing occupations are those that will require ever more postsecondary education or training (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2005; Strawn, 2007). But because the number of high school graduates in Minnesota is expected to peak in 2009, then steadily decline for the next two decades (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2006), it is vital that we look beyond the education of “traditional” college students to fill those jobs. The non-traditional students coming through the Adult Basic Education system in Minnesota offer a pool of potential workers to fill that gap.

### What is ABE?

Adult Basic Education is delivered statewide at over 500 sites located in public schools, workforce centers, community/technical colleges, prisons/jails, libraries, learning centers, tribal centers, and non-profit organizations. To be eligible to participate in ABE, an individual must be 16 or over, not enrolled in secondary school, and functioning below the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level in any of the basic academic areas including reading, math, writing and speaking English. Just under 80,000 Minnesotans participated in ABE in 2008; approximately 50% of those adults received English as a Second Language services (Shaffer, 2008).

Traditionally, ABE has focused on basic skills, literacy, English language instruction and high school equivalency (GED). Two important aspects of the ABE scope and mission are significant when thinking about the future workforce needs of the adult population in Minnesota: 1) the need to provide basic skills and literacy instruction and 2) a focus on skills related to learners' need to obtain, retain or improve employment. With the changing realities of work in MN, ABE practitioners have acknowledged the need for education beyond a high school diploma or GED for students. Unfortunately, it is also clear that students who complete a GED program with ABE remain largely unprepared to succeed in postsecondary education (Reder, 2007). Recognizing this, the Minnesota Department of Education launched a three year ABE Transition to Post-Secondary Initiative to run from 2007-2010. Leaders at the state level, including Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) administrators, are participating in this initiative.

### What is the ABE Transitions to Post-Secondary Initiative?

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of literacy instruction and workforce preparation by calling for “basic skills instruction, counseling, and study skills to assist students who seek entry into credit bearing programs at postsecondary institutions” (Shaffer, 2008, p. 1). In addition to increased training in academic preparation, addressing the gaps that currently exist between ABE and higher education will also require increased communication, cooperation, and collaboration between ABE providers and postsecondary staff and faculty. Thus, ABE providers have committed to reaching out to local postsecondary institutions to ensure articulation with postsecondary requirements and curricula and to perhaps co-locate ABE services on college campuses in order to best serve students. MnSCU administrators are “strongly committed” to this initiative. Linda Baer, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, authored a memo sent to MnSCU presidents, chief academic officers and chief student affairs officers in support of the increased collaboration:

You are encouraged to initiate or respond to requests for local meetings with ABE representatives. If your institution is not already a co-located site for ABE, consider the possibility of how you could collaborate with your local ABE center to improve access, provide space, and/or improve college readiness and transition services. (Memo dated August 22, 2007)

For the last two years, Minnesota ABE has participated in many activities connected to the Transitions initiative. This includes local programs searching for collaborative opportunities at nearby MnSCU institutions, and building an annual state-sponsored ABE Transitions to Postsecondary Conference that includes ABE, higher education, and individuals from state employment and workforce education. What has not happened in any systematic way is linking ABE to the larger developmental education (DE) community in Minnesota.

#### **What are the implications for ABE and DE?**

It makes sense for ABE and DE instructors to find ways to work together given the overlap in student populations: the same adults in need of remediation or unprepared for the academic demands of higher education who are served by ABE might also be found in DE classes in local colleges. In addition, ABE and DE educators “tend to share similar values regarding educational opportunity and the potential of all students to be successful. They also tend to be more committed to teaching underprepared students than faculty involved in other segments of postsecondary education” (Boylan, 2004, p. 10). There are also similar goals regarding student success in postsecondary education. The ABE Transitions Initiative goals to provide instruction and support for students hoping to go on to higher education is not so different from a key goal of developmental education to “maintain academic standards by enabling learners to acquire competencies needed for success in mainstream college courses” (NADE, 2009). Clearly, both systems share an interest in advancing the skills and postsecondary success of adult learners. Our challenge is to find ways to best achieve that success for our students by working together.

Examples of successful collaboration between ABE and DE can provide important insights as we look for increasing ways to partner in Minnesota. First, it is important to engage in dialogue that acknowledges our similarities, beginning with a shared student-centered philosophy “in which student needs are considered first...[In successfully collaborating] programs, student learning is integral to the mission of the program; it is also the measure by which the programs define their success” (Boylan, 2004, p. 20). By focusing our attention on the learners and our shared mission to successfully move students into postsecondary education, I hope that we can recognize ourselves as components of a larger educational system, with ABE transitions programming and college DE serving as complementary pieces of a developmental education continuum.

That developmental continuum is anchored by the differing strengths of our two systems: ABE can provide free services at levels

below college-prep, while DE offers a stepping-stone into the college curriculum (Boylan, 2004). ABE, having grown historically from a system providing basic literacy instruction and alternatives to the high school diploma through the GED program, is ideally suited to provide services to those students at the lowest end of the developmental continuum. Because students on the lower developmental end will likely need much more in terms of remediation before being ready to succeed at college-level coursework, there is a much greater chance that they will fail to complete the necessary DE courses at the college and continue. In addition, ABE also has substantial flexibility and can often schedule courses in smaller units to make things more manageable for the adult learner (Choitz & Prince, 2008). Finally, many ABE students fall into the lowest socio-economic levels, so the costs of multiple DE courses can exhaust resources before students have a chance to succeed in higher education. Providing no-cost transitions services for those at the lower-end of the developmental continuum can ease students into DE and may reduce the need for multiple remediation courses at the college (Strawn, 2007).

At the other end of that continuum are DE courses for students who are more highly skilled but still underprepared. Adults already at the higher end could enroll directly into college DE, of course, but students less prepared could receive free transitions services through ABE to brush up skills and better prepare them for the more academic demands of DE, thereby increasing their chances of continuing and succeeding. Additionally, DE is ideally situated to provide academic development in key areas while allowing students to simultaneously enroll in credit-bearing courses at the college, thereby allowing them to get the help needed in targeted areas while beginning work on a credential or degree. And working within the college system gives DE educators the chance to support the move for students into the regular college curriculum, something not as easy for ABE programs physically separated from college campuses. It makes sense to explore ways to identify and refer students between services offered in ABE or DE courses in order to increase the likelihood of success for students.

### **Challenges and Opportunities for ABE and DE Collaboration**

There are complications, of course. Issues of curriculum and instructional alignment form real challenges to student success within the existing systems. This is further complicated by the vastly different assessment tools used by ABE and DE to place and advance students. In the study of successful ABE/DE collaborations, Boylan (2004) found that many of the educators who were interviewed for the study felt that the different assessment instruments made for a great deal of confusion, where students “who could be served profitably by developmental education programs find themselves in adult education and many who could profit from adult education find themselves in developmental education” (p. 8). Ensuring regularity between exit standards for ABE and entry standards for DE will make for more fluid movement between the two. This is easier said than done, because such regularity is further complicated by the lack of standardized exit/entry standards within systems. Nevertheless, finding ways for ABE and DE educators to better align curriculum and shared expectations for exit and entry standards is a significant component of effective collaboration, so it may be helpful to focus on alignment at a more local level, with ABE consortia and local college DE educators working together within regions of the state.

We can further the opportunity for dialogue and collaboration between ABE and DE practitioners by increasing participation in shared professional development. There are multiple ways that this can begin in MN, including attendance at the MNADE conference in September or the ABE Transitions Conference scheduled for November. There are certainly many examples of ways that ABE and DE in Minnesota have already found to partner, especially for those ABE programs co-located on college campuses. We ought to find more ways to share the successes and challenges of those partnerships. Who is doing what? How is it working?

## Conclusion

By developing and funding the ABE Transitions to Postsecondary Initiative, MDE is acknowledging that ABE needs to do a better job teaching the transitional skills necessary for post-secondary success for our adult students. As part of this initiative, ABE is working hard to integrate academic skills into existing curriculum and provide professional development to ABE teachers, especially in the areas of transitional reading, writing, math, and study skills. One missing component of that initiative involves working collaboratively with the college-level educators who share our values and our student population – DE.

MNADE has established goals within their constitution that are relevant to work with ABE on this project, such as “engaging in the specific and general coordination of efforts with other organizations and person having purposes supportive of, or in harmony with, MNADE concerns” (MNADE, 2009). It is my hope that by working with MNADE, MN ABE can become a valuable partner: together we can identify where collaboration already exists, and bring others into the conversation to work on increasing collaboration and sharing professional development opportunities. There is a lot at stake for our students and our state.

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## Fourth Annual Regional Meetings

Pattie Wheeler-Andrews

In the first few days of April, MNADE members and their colleagues had the opportunity to gather with others in their region to learn what's happening on other campuses, discover what keeps all of us committed to our profession, talk about what we're reading and teaching, and share dinner together.

In the central metro region, Kathy Wellington and Patty Wheeler Andrews arranged the meeting at St. Paul's original Green Mill on Thursday, April 2. Eighteen people from nine campuses (five community colleges and four undergraduate/graduate universities) created a lively and energetic conversation about books, articles, classroom strategies, and campus politics amid budget cuts. (You'll receive the list of books and articles on the Google groups MNADE listserv.) Nancy Patton, MNADE president, drew campus names to distribute three books by Sheryl Feinstein, our keynote speaker for the Fall 2009 MNADE conference in Rochester on September 24-25. (Mark your calendar and your syllabi.) Two participants new to MNADE joined both our dinner and our organization that evening. After several rounds of door prizes, we agreed to meet again next spring; Ann Ludlow of Minneapolis Community and Technical College offered to coordinate the 2010 event. We all left with new energy, fresh ideas, and an appreciation of what our collaborative organization provides for us as professionals.

This spring did not include a Southern Regional meeting. However, we welcome any volunteers who are willing to coordinate the 2010 spring meeting. Members of the MNADE Executive Board will be pleased to work with anyone who has interest in serving our colleagues in this way.

Thanks to all who attended the Fourth Annual Spring Regional meetings, another excellent approach to stay connected with our profession and our colleagues across the state.



### Daniel T. Willingham's Bio

I earned my B.A. from Duke University in 1983, and my PhD in Cognitive Psychology from Harvard University in 1990. I am currently a Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, where I have taught since 1992. Until about 2000, my research focused solely on the brain basis of learning and memory. Today all of my research concerns the application of cognitive psychology to K-12 education. I write the "Ask the Cognitive Scientist" column for *American Educator* magazine.

## Summer Reading Suggestions

Laurel Watt

Well, maybe not summer reading in the leisurely, bon-bon munching restorative sense, but here are a couple of things you may want to track down when the beach books start getting old. First, in the Fall 2008 edition of *Thought and Action* (mailed to your home over the holidays courtesy of your NEA affiliation), there's a nice little article by Charles J. Abate titled, "You Say Multitasking Like It's a Good Thing." It's very accessible; you might want to use it in some of your classes. Also, the Winter 2008-2009 edition of *American Educator* contained another article by Daniel T. Willingham titled, "What Will Improve a Student's Memory?" You may have tossed this issue aside if you thought the whole issue was devoted to spelling (see cover) as I almost did. However, Willingham, who is a regular contributor to *American Educator*, has some nice examples of mnemonics and also some interesting demonstrations of the memory principles he discusses in the article. This is an author you may want to pay attention to; I have found that he does a very good job of making distinctions between the learning theory that is actually based on research versus the learning theory that has been rehashed year after year in our study skills texts with no critical evaluation or empirical support. (Many of his previous articles can be found at [www.danielwillingham.com](http://www.danielwillingham.com)) And finally, take a look at the article about Jodi Picoult's books and fans in the April 20<sup>th</sup> edition of *Newsweek* titled, "Why Is It a Sin to Read for Fun?" Then, you can transition back to your beach books and sin a little bit yourself.

Laurel Watt

