Ninth Annual Summit on Evidence-based Education

Adopting Evidence-based Practices in Education: Bridging the Culture Gap

Post- Summit 2014 Commentaries by Participants

Sheila Alber-Morgan
Bryan Cook
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Post Summit Commentary

Sheila Alber-Morgan

I was truly honored to be invited to the Wing Institute summit and have the opportunity to work with such a smart, dynamic, and diverse group of individuals who share a common goal for the future. Participating in this event made me reflect on my own experiences as a classroom teacher in the context of the research-to-practice gap.

In the early 1990s, I was a fourth-grade teacher in a rural unincorporated fishing and farming community in the South Carolina low country. It was a scenic place located at the crossroads of a couple of state highways surrounded by swamp forests inhabited by giant wading birds and alligators. My classroom was a trailer (with wheels). About 500 students attended the local elementary school and a large minority of them were Gullah. The Gullah are descendants of African slaves from Sierra Leone whose language is English-based Creole with African loanwords (you learn all about that when you mistakenly refer a Gullah child for speech therapy).

In any event, there was a lot of poverty, low achievement, low test scores, and high teacher turnover. In order to address the low test scores, our administrators frequently hired consultants to provide us with staff development. One year we received ongoing staff development for implementing the whole language approach to teach reading and language arts. The plan was to integrate whole language instruction into a collaborative schoolwide thematic unit. But before we could plan, the consultant engaged us in self-awareness and trust building exercises so we would all be great friends while we did our collaborative planning. The self-awareness and trust building activities (which probably had nothing to do with whole language) included closing our eyes and listening to new age music in the dark while the consultant said inspirational and relaxing things. Other activities included getting in small groups and talking about our feelings, exploring our collaboration styles, playing hug tag (i.e., run around the room hugging people), and holding hands in a circle and singing (I wish I was kidding). Anyway, after all of that, we got around to the planning. We selected literature for each grade level, decided on fun activities, art projects, and various ways to make every student effort serve an authentic purpose. But we weren't supposed to teach phonemic awareness or phonics, it was all about teaching whole words as meaningful units and discovering meaning in context. Well, the plan was implemented for the whole school year, and the test scores went down. I don't think anyone was surprised. Our struggling readers needed direct instruction to learn to read. Over the next couple years, our staff development workshops exposed us to a wide variety of different educational fads with no empirical support, and our test scores remained low.

I left my teaching job and enrolled in the PhD program at Ohio State University right after I divorced my first husband, sold my mobile home, packed up my Buick, and gave away my live chickens (again, not kidding!). When I left, I remember wondering if this elementary school would ever find its way.

One of the first things I learned about in the PhD program 20 years ago was the research-to-practice gap. There were a lot of readings and discussions about how to bring evidence-based practices into schools, many of the discussions similar to those at the recent Wing Institute summit. During these recent discussions, I found myself wondering what had become of my unincorporated community school in rural South Carolina, and if any evidence-based practices ever took hold there over the years.

When I searched my old school's website, I was delighted to see that the school has been implementing schoolwide PBIS, and it had also been selected as a *Silver Award Winning School* (2013–2014) for *Closing the Achievement Gap*. After seeing this, I felt very optimistic that our ongoing efforts over the years may really be making an impact. I applaud the work of the Wing Institute and its persistent efforts to change education for the better and enhance the quality of life for all of our students. The snail's pace of change can be disheartening at times, but the story of my unincorporated community school gives me a lot of hope for the future.

Post-Summit Commentary

Bryan Cook

At the conclusion of my first Wing Institute summit, my thought is that I'm a little jealous of Randy, Jack, and Ronnie. I had a wonderful couple of days sharing ideas and learning from smart, committed, energizing, and kind colleagues. The location, good food, and fine wine didn't hurt either. I'm sure it is inaccurate, but I picture the three of them doing this type of thing year-round. Despite my envy, I leave feeling hopeful—not only energized by the new ideas and collegiality of the summit, but also knowing that the field is in good hands. The people in that room will do a lot of good for a lot of people and continue to advance evidence-based practices.

We talked a fair amount about culture in applied instructional settings over the 2 days. My take-home messages from the summit all relate to culture in some way. First, I am struck by how important it is to recharge our collective batteries by spending time engaged in productive but unstressed discussion and planning with like-minded colleagues. I suspect that in our professional lives, most of us spend considerable time with students/clients, families, practitioners, colleagues, policy makers, researchers, and other stakeholders who—although we may share much—have discordant experiences and perspectives on critical issues. In many professional interactions, we have to tread lightly on certain issues, be careful about what we say and how we say it, and compromise on what we think is the best course of action. At best this is difficult and annoying, and at worse it compromises learner outcomes.

The couple of days at the summit were different. I wasn't watching what I said, having to explain what I was thinking/saying, or working to convince someone of something that seemed obvious to me. Not that we do or should agree on everything, but it is important, safe, and energizing to be among one's own tribe. To make sure my thoughts were at least not deeply inconsistent with the empirical literature on the effects of "belonging," I did a quick search on Google Scholar to get a cursory sense of what we actually know about this. As you might suspect, Baumeister and Leary (1995) summarized, "Belongingness appears to have multiple and strong effects on emotional patterns and on cognitive processes. Lack of attachment is linked to a variety of ill effects on health, adjustment, and well being" (p. 497). Godin (2008) opined, non-empirically, that tribes acting together are critical for realizing change. The Wing Institute, then, may not only make us feel good, but it might also make us think more clearly and have greater impact on our work.

Throughout the discussions and presentations I was surprised by how often I found myself thinking about applying the lessons to my academic department. As much as the ideas we talked about were primarily focused on improving the effectiveness of PK–12 school settings, other factors—such as feedback loops, personnel decisions, culture, fundamentals, data-based decision making, leadership, a clear and operationalized vision, and dissemination of ideas—are also critical to teacher education generally and my department specifically. For example, thinking about the faculty meeting I'm attending tomorrow and the multiple initiatives that we have undertaken and are planning, the importance of a clear vision, sticking to the fundamentals, and creating and using a feedback loop are evident. As the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) report highlights, typical teacher preparation leaves much to be desired. Yet, despite the

perceived importance and many shortcomings of teacher preparation, we seem to have little empirical basis for its reform. Examining the culture of colleges of education and the impact of interventions aimed at improving the culture may, then, be fruitful.

Finally, George Sugai recommended the book *Coach Wooden's Greatest Secret* by Pat Williams. I've ordered it and can't wait to read it. Growing up as a basketball fan outside of Los Angeles in the '70s, I have long admired Coach Wooden. The story about him teaching All-Americans how to put on their socks and shoes always makes me smile and nod approvingly. In just about every facet of life, but especially for educational researchers and school leaders, I think the message of fundamentals is key. As I touched on briefly in my presentation on dissemination, trying to be a jack of all trades often renders us a master of none. And we school leaders and the learners we seek to impact need to master those fundamentals. This applies to culture too. Culture is so multifaceted that it is easy to lose the forest for the trees. Identifying the key aspects of school (or departmental or whatever) culture and having a clear focus on optimizing them (fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals) is therefore very important. George's article on conceptualizing culture within an ABA framework seems to be an important first step in this direction.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*(3), 497–529.

Godin, S. (2008). *Tribes: We need you to lead us*. London: Penguin Group.

Post Summit Commentary

Ken Denny

"The nice thing about enemies is you know where they stand. This is not always true of friends." General Sergey Voloshin" (in Tom Clancy's *Without Remorse*)

A very wise professor once told me there were two ways to present a cat to an audience. (I never asked why you would want to give a cat to a group of people, but if he was talking about it, the importance was implied.) First, you can walk out and gently hold the cat in your arms in front of you. Then you stroke it, listen to it purr, and watch it stretch and knead your arm with its claws. Next, you let the audience members touch it before you gently hand it to the first person who follows your model and hands the cat to the next person. Or you can grab it by the tail, swing it around your head a couple of times, and launch it out into the middle of the group. You may well have accomplished similar outcomes—the cat has moved from the first person and into the group—although the establishing operations for the cat's behavior have probably been altered considerably and the antecedent for the individuals in the group may well be quite different (not only a cat but a really agitated cat).

It is my belief that in much the way that people identify as "cat people" or "other," including those in "I hate cats" groups, practitioners and decision makers will decide that an approach (constructivist or behavioral) is a "cat" or "not a cat" rather quickly. This decision and possibly subsequent behavior will be based on several aspects of the presenter's verbal behavior and individuals' learning histories. I believe that the response effort (cost) and plausible deniability are two aspects that work against behavior analyst and behavioral educators. Building a skill repertoire is difficult and time-consuming, and the long-term nature is daunting. Which skills to develop often depends on values, and decision making is critical and requires good sources of feedback (data) to be successful. As George Sugai conveyed in his presentation, if we are to make innovation acceptable/palatable and "sticky," we should start with the smallest things that make the biggest difference (lower response cost and frequent reinforcement). I think the similarities among the summit discussion groups in terms of the key elements identified indicate a large number of common ideas on how to proceed.

With the much-touted movement for teacher accountability, the axiom of "what gets ranked, gets spanked" describes a culture of reinforcement not based on our knowledge of feedback. Teachers and administrators may well be very resistant to removing the plausible deniability inherent in constructivist thinking. There is little room for plausible deniability if we are discouraged (maybe not completely prevented in light of predispositions) in using the cat's coloring, its parental units, or how much we paid for the cat as an excuse for why it did not learn/behave as expected. Teaching defined by evidence of student behavior change is a fundamental component of the science of learning. This dependence on evidence eliminates the plausible deniability of many instructional efforts whose foundations are in non-observable or indirect evaluation. Therefore, behavioral orientations may be largely aversive to the general teaching population. Whether we can become less aversive will depend to some extent on our marketing, but it largely depends on how far away from being a "cat" we are able and willing to move.

In closing, I want to be very clear that no cats were harmed in the production of this commentary. Also, “dogs rule and cats drool!” (*Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey,* 1993).

Post Summit Commentary

Wing Reflections 2009-14
David Forbush - Associate Director
Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education

The 2014 Wing Institute summit was excellent! The speakers, activities, food, accommodations, and collegial interactions were terrific. Thanks to Jack, Jin An, Randy, Ronnie, and all the presenters and attendees! Over the past 5 years, participation in this event has changed my perspective, provided me with added colleagues, extended my knowledge, and sharpened my skills. Wing has produced meaningful change in people with whom I interact and in the systems with which I engage. Now, several thoughts come to me from Wing 2014, and from other summits of the past 5 years.

First, of the myriad supports currently present in schools (e.g., transportation, food services, secretarial and administrative supports, custodial workers, playground assistants, assessment specialists, instructional coaches...the list goes on), none is sufficiently powerful alone, or even collectively, to substantially advance student learning if the interactions between students and teachers remain unchanged. Without changes in what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is monitored, and without data-directed changes, all these other supports become tangential and of little to no consequence.

Second, George Sugai recommended the book *Coach Wooden's Greatest Secret: The Power of a Lot of Little Things Done Well.* I already have begun reading it, believing before I cracked the spine, that to achieve excellence, one must attend to the small details overlooked by others. My 14-year-old son and I are reading it together, with the hope that he learns at this young age that many aspects of life will be enhanced by attending to the small details that make a difference. Voltaire wrote, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." Perhaps it's the acceptance of good that is the enemy of excellence. I have been privileged to interact with two small groups of people who found good distasteful and could only be sated by excellence. Each experience was a watershed one for me.

Third, this past summer, a colleague (Lowell Oswald) and I wrote a brief article in *The Utah Special Educator*. I share the gist of it, because I believe that the perspectives offered to Utah administrators are the net effect of my accumulated learnings in recent years, and with a very strong dose originating from Wing Institute annual summits (2009–14). I believe you will find, in the following excerpts, evidence of past Wing presentations, activities, and discussions. Thanks for another great year! By the way, the following picture is in competition with Janet Twyman's image of SuperHero Teacher in her 2013 reflection. I will start with a black and white image and maybe go to color next year—I'll see.

Instructional Leadership: A Courageous Journey

In the movie *Pearl Harbor* (2001), after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt is shown meeting with his cabinet and describing the psychological necessity to show Japanese and Americans alike that we could strike mainland Japan. Roosevelt's cabinet parried, "The task is too difficult," "It's too dangerous," and "It is simply impossible, it cannot be done!" President Roosevelt, with leg braces supporting his polio-impaired legs and with great strength and determination, rose from his wheelchair to show that if desire is sufficient a way can be found. Standing, he said, "Do not tell me it is too hard!"

Later, and as a result of President Roosevelt's objective (i.e., strike mainland Japan), Captain Doolittle is shown describing the objective to a group of pilots and asking anyone willing to complete the mission to step forward, while disclosing that they may not return. He told the men that they were assigned to do what had never been done before—to launch bombers off the deck of an aircraft carrier.

Fast-forward and Captain Doolittle is on the deck of an aircraft carrier with pilots, crew, and mechanics. He admonished, "If we are to accomplish our objective and successfully launch our bombers these fat ladies must be made thin." The crew is later shown removing all parts of the bomber not absolutely required to achieve the objective. After significant preparation, training, and lightening, the bombers take off and are in the sky and guided to mainland Japan using data from navigation equipment that passed weight elimination screenings because of its absolute necessity for progressively charting course. The pilots, known as Doolittle's Raiders, delivered

the physical and psychological blow commissioned by President Roosevelt and infused Americans with the necessary boost in morale and courage to prepare them for the hardships of the war ahead.

I share the Pearl Harbor incident that Lowell Oswald and I wrote about because the field of education faces similar challenges and opportunities for success. There are four key points in this story deserving attention and adoption in our work as instructional leaders.

First, to achieve our objective we must pinpoint and then consistently focus on it. Our goal must be student learning (i.e., improved student academic and social-behavioral outcomes).

Second, we need to carefully select our strategies and resources. Just as Doolittle removed equipment and payload that weighed down the bombers, we must reduce weight through alignment of systems. That means removing all ineffective and unnecessary practices.

Third, we need a detailed implementation plan that moves us from "allowing implementation to happen" to "making implementation happen." Deep implementation of practices and procedures occurs only with a well-thought-out and explicit plan.

Fourth, just as Doolittle used navigation equipment, we need data systems that inform us of our progress toward our objective (i.e., universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessments). Without good data we are prone to protect and fight for practices that may not help us achieve our pinpointed objective.

Focus 1: Pinpoint Objective and Maintain Focus

Ben Levin (2009) reminds us that "engaging others in change requires will and skill, but ultimately persistence as there will be periods where performance may be flat and progress may be slow. The main challenge then is one of maintaining focus over time; keeping going despite setbacks and disappointments; to be resilient to criticism; and not to be discouraged when progress is slow."

Consider the following statements about the need to pinpoint an objective and maintain focus over time:

"The vast majority of improvement plans have too many goals and strategies; consequently, the efforts of staff are spread across so many initiatives that they are rarely implemented effectively, nor do they then achieve the intended outcomes" (McNulty & Besser, 2011).

"The compelling conclusion of the research is that schools with higher levels of focus not only have higher levels of student achievement. . . [they] are also better able to implement other essential leadership and teaching strategies" (Reeves, 2011).

“The single variable that had the highest relationship with increased student performance was focus. Focus results in student achievement gains that are five times greater than schools and districts that score lower in focus” (Reeves, 2011).

“Numerous researchers caution against adopting too many initiatives that detract from the improvement focus and usually result in ‘initiative fatigue’ ” (Reeves, 2006).

I been said in the past that if you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there. It is not just knowing where you’re going that gets you there, but a vehicle that is reliable and suited to the trip. In education, our objectives must pinpoint clear outcomes. If not, it will be difficult to impossible to select appropriate vehicles (i.e., curriculum, instructional format, practice formats…) to get there.

Idea/Action: It’s easy to get caught up in “human windmill” behavior, or simply being busy for the sake of being busy. To avoid this trap, Daniels (2000) suggests “always pinpoint results before you pinpoint behavior.” Or get clear about what you want as an outcome (pinpointed and measurable student outcome) and then pinpoint the instructional behaviors leading to the outcome. Additionally, he recommends, “Always evaluate the changes in behavior against the changes in results.” Or be careful espousing that a particular set of instructional behaviors are the “right behaviors” to produce the pinpointed outcome. Watch the data.

Focus 2: Reduce Weight and Align Systems

To attain our pinpointed objectives, we must reduce weight through alignment of systems. Consider the current context, where expectations are rising, resources diminishing, and increasingly diverse student populations are entering our schools. It is our contention that aligning systems is vital to the attainment of our objectives.

A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) in a school or district requires more complete teaming among educators and incremental dismantling of silos (e.g., regular and special education, Title I). Such silos increase weight and reduce the agility and flexibility in education to address student achievement. MTSS involves the systematic use of assessment data to efficiently allocate resources in order to improve learning for all students. MTSS process screens for evidence-based practices and removes practices bereft of compelling data. This “skinnying down” increases focus on programs and practices with evidence and on the detailed implementation required to achieve desired outcomes. The term “pinpoint” is used intentionally, as there is little space at the point of a pin, and getting clear about what we want to achieve and how we intend to achieve it is essential.

Steve Kukic (2013) reminds us that “Our ideologies should not predetermine our decisions...If it works, keep doing it. If it doesn’t, we must stop...Each of our students needs whatever she/he needs to be successful. The only way to be sure that we provide ‘whatever,’ is to collect

formative data about the effect of all of our instructional strategies on each of our students. Those that work, we continue. Those that don't, we stop using."

Additionally, Og Lindsley (1990) explained, "A general rule of thumb is that if a student is progressing according to plan, then the program is appropriate for the student; otherwise, there is a flaw in the program and it needs to be changed in some way. In other words, the student's performance determines the 'right' teaching strategy."

Steve Kukic (2013) wrote, "Organizing these strategies into a MTSS (one district-wide system, many data-based supports, directed by district-wide non-negotiables) is a proven transformational strategy that works." MTSS is designed to address the academic and behavioral needs of all students. It is an overarching framework for school improvement that includes the following components:

1. Leadership, effective teaming, and problem solving
2. Communication, political support, and parent engagement
3. Alignment of policies, procedures, and resources across classroom, school, district, and state levels
4. Evidence-based professional development with ongoing coaching and technical assistance
5. An evaluation process that monitors both fidelity of implementation and student outcomes
6. Effective core instruction, continuum of increasingly intense evidence-based interventions, and data-informed decision making (core, supplemental, and intensive)
7. Instructionally relevant assessments that are reliable and valid, and have multiple purposes (universal screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring)

Idea/Action: The fourth MTSS component listed above—evidence-based professional development with coaching and technical support—helps facilitate sustained implementation of effective practices (McIntosh et al., 2013). Districts and schools working to implement MTSS must provide evidence-based professional development in order for teachers and students to receive the intended benefit of the professional learning experience. We cannot afford to waste precious resources on ineffective training practices. Rob Horner (2009) reminds us that any teacher skill-development effort should be supplemented with active coaching to help facilitate fidelity of implementation and sustained implementation of effective practices.

As we all know, training settings are controlled settings without all the complexities and challenges of typical classrooms. Appropriately, many of these complexities are suspended to facilitate early learning of a skill or program. However, if coaching is not present in the classroom, this complexity will result in either the new skill/program never being used or being used so differently (i.e., poor fidelity) that it would be difficult to argue that it was still evidence-based.

Focus 3: Make Systematic Implementation Plans

A systematic implementation plan should be sufficiently detailed to move us from "allowing implementation to happen" to "making implementation happen." One author recently came upon the following statement, "It is one thing to say with the Prophet Amos, 'Let justice roll down like mighty waters,' and quite another to work out the irrigation system." Each of us may have identified an evidence-based practice, but like Amos, substantial thought and planning must be given to designing the irrigation or implementation system. Clearly, deep implementation of evidence-based practices occurs only with a well-thought-out and explicit plan.

According to McNulty (2011), one of our biggest challenges in education is the failure to implement well. We struggle to focus on critical learning targets and monitor and provide feedback to educators so they know where they are in the implementation process**.**

In a briefing report on school improvement, Jerald (2005) stated, "As thousands of administrators and teachers have discovered too late, implementing an improvement plan—at least any plan worth its salt—really comes down to changing complex organizations in fundamental ways. Unfortunately, educational researchers, policy-makers, and leaders have consistently failed to acknowledge and communicate the importance of [the] crucial implementation stage in the school improvement process. Indeed, given the emphasis on planning—and relative silence about implementation—many of the guidebooks and tools meant to help with school improvement, give school leaders the impression that if a team gets the plan right, successful implementation of the plan must surely follow" (p. 2).

Idea/Action: Substantial science is accumulating to support effective implementation. The University of North Carolina's State Implementation and Scaling up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP) and North Carolina at Chapel Hill's National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) provide helpful information on the Active Implementation Hub. This free website (http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu) provides online learning experiences for use by persons and groups seeking to implement evidence-based practices. The objective of the site is to improve leaders' knowledge of factors that substantially increase the likelihood of effective initial implementation and then scaling the implementation up and sustaining it over time. Consider working through the short 30- to 60-minute modules with leadership teams, providing time for discussion about how the information and tools provided can be employed in implementation efforts. Each module provides content, activities, handouts, and assessments to support you in implementation efforts.

Focus 4: Use Directive Data Systems

We need data systems that inform us of our progress toward our objective. These systems must be instructionally relevant and provide reliable and valid information. Clearly, without good data unfailingly directing us to our pinpointed objective, we will likely miss our target, or hit it and not know it.

Student outcome data must guide decisions about instruction. “A growing body of evidence suggests that when teachers collaborate to pose and answer questions informed by data from their own students, their knowledge grows and their practice changes” (David, 2008–09).

Fidelity data can also be used to help improve teacher practice. Consider the following questions about the need for collecting such data:

• How do you know if teachers need more or different feedback, supports, coaching, or professional development?

• How do you identify and replicate specific aspects of effective instruction?

• How do you know how to reduce or eliminate ineffective instructional practices?

Idea/Action: Despite the many instructional benefits of data-informed decision making, evidence demonstrates that teachers and school leaders still struggle to use assessment data for improving student learning outcomes (Means, Padilla, DeBarger, & Bakia, 2009).

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Post Summit Commentary

Sam Redding

Before I began writing this commentary, I read my commentary from a year ago to see if my thinking has changed much since then and to what extent that thinking was challenged or reinforced by the recent Wing event. For me, the couple of days attending the summit were an intellectual oasis in which green palms sprout from a desert of monotonous bureaucratic dunes disturbed by occasional sandstorms. Actually, the rest of the year isn't all that bad, but hyperbole is fun, and Wing is the tallest tree in the forest (or palm in the desert), and I am wondering now what behaviorist do with metaphors, mixed or otherwise. I am not certain that metaphors grow in vividness in proportion to the opportunity to respond.

My notes from the summit are a mess. I have something about fur stuck to Larry's tongue next to a reminder to order the book *Coach Wooden's Greatest Secret*. I don't think the two are related. But I ordered the book, and I have it at my side. The cover says, "The Power of a Lot of Little Things Done Well." That is the idea that struck me. In our work with school improvement, we confront the conventional advice to "set three goals and make a plan." Three is a nice number, but reaching one of the goals invariably requires doing a thousand little things well. School plans typically look past the thousand things in their plans, gazing ahead to the big goal. Implementation science instructs us to not overlook the little things and that it is important to do them well. Little things, the professional practices that snowball into powerful teaching and result in improved learning, provide their own sources of data about what and how well we are doing. That side of the data equation is often ignored, as we stretch out multiple spreadsheets of data about student outcomes. We seldom measure the independent variables of instructional design, strategy, and delivery. Feedback on our own practice makes us nervous, even more than the many measures of student progress, the dependent variables.

The video of the teacher clapping, pointing, and eliciting student responses prompted two thoughts: (1) how much I love to see a teacher so "explicitly" engaged with students around a concrete learning objective, in a way that seems likely to result in all the kids meeting the objective while having fun; and (2) what it would be like for the kid who understood the lesson after the second hand clap but was gazing out the window in boredom, or the one who was still scratching his head when the teacher moved on to the next topic. Time for a little individualization, perhaps. But I know that in practice, too many teachers neglect the explicit teaching while sending students off on individual paths of self-discovery. Which reminds me of Daniel Willingham's point that critical thinking requires that we first have something in our heads to think critically about. Memory is good, and drill is not necessarily kill but often the road to learning that sticks.

The three Wingsters—Randy, Jack, and Ronnie—never fail to impress me with how much myth they can debunk with the simple presentation of facts (data) within coherent frames. Great word, "frames," which I probably never used before but will confidently trot out now. Demolishing other people's frames is the joy of my work, even if it does little for making friends. Just try challenging the "learning styles" expert in a crowd of educators, or quibbling with the one who

just read a book about brain science, or those who reserve no room for doubt that the constructivist view is the only legitimate perspective given "all that we now know." Pity the poor students who suffered under teachers before all this was known.

Teacher preparation programs are long on constructivism and short on sound techniques for classroom management. Education professors, it seems, are philosophers and not masters equipping their young apprentices to succeed in their chosen trade. Masters would insist upon fidelity (quality) in doing a lot of little things well.

I wrote a few pieces over the past year in which I tried to explicate (for myself as well as readers) the connection between the teacher's methods and the student's bolstering of four personal competencies: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social/emotional. I attempted to project explicit methods for the teacher and behavioral markers for the students, always looking for the middle road, the blending of "frames" in a way that captures the power of each. I don't think I yet have a convincing "framework" (a word I *have* used before), but the effort is satisfying (intrinsically motivating?). In writing about these things, I introduced "relational suasion" as a somewhat mystical (sorry) independent variable in a student's learning that is the asset found in the student's relationship with the teacher. I introduced relational suasion, in part, to throw speed bumps in the highway of technological solutions to learning. I like technology. I even have one of those little telephones with a touch screen where I can see pictures of my grandkids. And I fiddle away hours surfing the net. But, darn it, kids like to please their teacher, and there is power in that simple fact. When a teacher knows her students, shows she cares about them, and then teaches explicitly, the little rascals are inclined to perform in ways that are qualitatively different from how they interact with a machine. Maybe that is a romantic notion, but I'm sticking with it. At least until the Wingsters show me data that debunks my frame.

Post Summit Commentary

Mary Sawyer

Several experiences I had in the past year profoundly affected me and enhanced my understanding and appreciation of our science. In particular, conducting research funded by the Wing Institute, presenting at the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) conference, participating in the Wing summit, and clicker-training chickens have been opportunities instrumental in highlighting some fundamental themes for me. Overall, I have developed a much deeper understanding of what Murray Sidman was talking about in his book *Coercion and Its Fallout*.

"Positive reinforcement, not coercion, is the hallmark of behavior analysis."
Murray Sidman

I think that too often we focus so intently on the behavior of the teachers, students, and parents with whom we work that we forget to attend to our own behavior and to be sensitive to the leading role that it plays. I would like to think that those of us in a field that studies and explains behavior would never deliberately use coercion in our interactions with clients, participants, colleagues, and friends, but I suspect we need to do a better job of guarding against its use. I believe doing so will increase our chances of achieving the outcomes we want to see in our schools. Although my experiences in the past year have been overwhelmingly positive, they have also forced me to consider the flaws in how we do what we do. My first mentor in behavior analysis, Dr. Mark Koorland, was the first to present to me the notion that "You want your students to run to, not from, you." Given my recent experiences, I now truly feel that I understand what this concept means. An enriched understanding has further helped me to appreciate the significance of conceptualizing culture behavior analytically.

Coaching Research

I was able to run two studies with a total of three participants in two middle schools and one high school. Settings ranged from inclusion classrooms to resource rooms and a self-contained special education classroom. We targeted a total of 12 empirically supported treatments and found that these interventions were effective in improving academic and behavioral outcomes for students with a wide range of disabilities. All three student teachers achieved high levels of procedural fidelity following the implementation of behavioral skills training and/or coaching. Social validity was high across participants, and all three have already found jobs in the local Columbus, Ohio, area. We have begun planning for continued coaching support and research opportunities as they transition into their first year of teaching.

Through this research experience, I learned a great deal about the imperative of using positive reinforcement in my interactions with everyone in the school, from the janitors to the principals, and everyone in between. I learned the importance of ensuring my supervisees also apply this logic. I'm still learning to be the type of coach, project manager, and colleague whom people want to be around—one whom they are willing to trust and who offers feedback that is positive and valuable. I've found that winning over a person's trust requires an appreciation of the individual's culture. I'm thankful for this research opportunity and everything it has taught me.

NSTA

In April, I had the opportunity to go to Boston and present a literature review that Sheila and I co-authored with another doctoral student. The audience included teachers and administrators

who were interested in learning about using evidence-based practices to teach science to students with special needs. My hour was to be split with another presenter who turned out to be a no-show, so I found myself with much more time to fill than I had planned.

I decided to turn my talk into more of a discussion, and it was quite interesting to hear the perspectives and concerns of those teachers. They confided feelings of inadequacy in providing instruction to students with disabilities. Many of them cited a lack of training in instructional and behavioral techniques as the root of their problems. Further, most audience members claimed a lack of training and guidance in co-teaching prevented them from effectively utilizing the special educator in their classrooms. The consensus was that students with special needs are being placed in their science classes in order to meet IEP requirements, but little thought is given to the teachers. It is commonly assumed that the special educator and the science educator will figure out how to co-teach on their own, but this is not the case. Many of the teachers described feeling bad for not working with the special educator, but they weren't sure how to take the lead in collaborating.

This perspective was especially interesting to me, because I have been more familiar with the narrative of the "neglected" special educator. Again, it's all in how we frame our worldviews, and I believe taking the time to consider the perspectives of others is critical to the effective application of our science. We took time at the end of my presentation to help each other identify specific objectives for how we would like to change our co-teaching and collaborative relationships, and we brainstormed strategies to achieve these goals. The experience was very reinforcing for me, and it helped remind me that we all want the best for our students. I can only hope that I conveyed behavior analysis and evidence-based education in a way that was equally reinforcing.

Wing Institute Summit

I had the honor of participating in this year's Wing summit. It was such an incredible experience, one that was pivotal in shaping my understanding that the stakes are higher than ever and that evidence-based education is truly vital. I learned the implications a behavior analytic interpretation of culture may have in advancing our field and was reminded that in order to predict future behavior, we must always consider learning histories and membership in multiple cultures. Fundamentals are the key to success, whether in playing basketball or implementing PBIS. The way to get rid of bad teachers is to make them into good teachers, and we need to apply what we know about the principles of reinforcement to better market and disseminate our science. I learned that harmonics applies in school culture as it does in concert halls. School policies are driven by cultural frames, so it is up to us to figure out how to live with and shape our message into existing frames in order to transform "an industry of mediocrity" into a culture of successful teachers, students, and stakeholders.

"Being right is just not enough."

Jack States

Chicken Camp

Recently I had the opportunity to attend and participate in Terry Ryan's Chicken Camp, held at The Vista School in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Terry is a world-renowned dog trainer, and she conducts Chicken Camps both at her school, Legacy Canine Behavior and Training near Seattle, and at remote sites all over the world. Chicken Campers have included parents, teachers, behavior analysts, and even FBI agents and deep-sea commercial fishermen. For 3 days, I was able to hone my behavior analytic skills with a level of precision that captured the science of behavior at its core.

"When things don't work, it's diagnostic; it's not a failure."
Terry Ryan

I was reminded once more of the essentials: the imperative of attenuating to the details when arranging the environment and intentional planning of instructional steps, the marvelous power of positive reinforcement, and the fact that teaching can be efficient and effective without the application of aversives. As Terry says, a good behavior analyst is one who isn't afraid to "put her chicken on the table." Saying we have the magic bullet versus applying our science to disseminate knowledge is the difference between us being right and being effective. If we want to be effective, we must acknowledge that each of us sees the world through a different screen, and all learning depends upon a person's *umvelt,* a German word used to describe an individual's perceived view of the world. I found Terry's mantra, "It all depends on your umvelt," to align perfectly with our emphasis on understanding the power of educational cultures, as discussed in Berkeley.

In Sum

Through these experiences and many others, I have gained valuable knowledge and become equipped with many useful skills. I think our science is on the right track. It is exciting to be involved with such an influential and important movement as evidence-based education. I believe our field could benefit from being more generous with its collective provision of positive reinforcement in all interactions, and I think this is particularly true if we are to be successful in a constructivist world. I recognize that I'm preaching to the choir here, but I am thankful that I have been able to join that choir. Thanks to the positively reinforcing interactions I have had with folks like those who were at the summit, I am reassured that I have chosen the right field. Perhaps some of you can identify with the uncertainty I sometimes feel as I progress through my doctoral studies. Beyond reassurance, these experiences have invigorated me. I have been fortunate that people with experience and expertise far beyond my years have been patient, gentle, and supportive as I get my feet wet. Thanks to all of you summit participants for considering my umvelt and for being so inspirational and kind!

Post Summit Commentary

A Couple of Lingering Thoughts and the Answer to a Long-Standing and Insurmountable Problem

Mark D. Shriver

A Brief Commentary Following the Ninth Annual Summit on Evidence-Based Education
Adopting Evidence-Based Practices in Education: Bridging the Culture Gap

During this year's Wing Institute summit, I happened to be reading Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. Tolstoy was very much in the natural science camp when it came to explaining human behavior. In fact, one of my favorite quotes from Tolstoy is, "It is really impossible to describe a man, but it is possible to describe the effect he produces on me," which nicely foreshadows Skinner's writings, particularly regarding verbal behavior. More directly related to the topic of this year's summit, I was reminded of Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* which is largely concerned with how we are shaped by the events and people around us. Toward the end of the novel Tolstoy states:

> Just as then in the question of astronomy, now in the question of history, the whole difference of view rested on the recognition or non-recognition of an absolute unit as a measure of visible phenomena. For astronomy, this was the immobility of the earth; in history, the independence of the personality—free will.
>
> Just as in astronomy the difficulty of admitting the motion of the earth lay in the immediate sensation of the earth's stationariness and of the planet's motion, so in history the difficulty of recognizing the subjection of the personality to the laws of space and time and causation lies in the difficulty of surmounting the direct sensation of the independence of one's personality. But just as in astronomy, the new view said, "It is true, we do not feel the movement of the earth, but, if we admit its immobility, we are reduced to absurdity, while admitting its movement, we are led to laws"; so in history, the new view says, "It is true, we do not feel our dependence, but admitting our free will, we are led to absurdity; admitting our dependence on the external world, time, and cause, we are led to laws."
>
> In the first case, we had to surmount the sensation of an unreal immobility in space, and to admit a motion we could not perceive of by sense. In the present case, it is as essential to surmount a consciousness of an unreal freedom and to recognise a dependence not perceived by our senses. (Tolstoy, *War and Peace,* 1869, pp. 1109–1110)

I like this quote because it reminds me that the issues of culture change we were discussing are directly related to differences in philosophies regarding human behavior and child development and learning and that these differences are long-standing. Philosophers since Plato and Aristotle (and likely before) have discussed human behavior, child development, and how we should teach children (French, 2002). In early America, John Locke was influential in presenting his theories of child development and care in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693/1978), and in France, Rousseau wrote *Emile* (1762/1956) which presented another approach to child development and

care based on very different assumptions about human behavior and learning. Tolstoy's quote implies that the culture difference is between science and sensation/feelings (i.e., anti-science). Some of our conversation (and readings; see Carnine, 2000) at the recent Wing summit bordered on this type of description of the problem. However, it really is a problem of differing philosophies and assumptions about human behavior and learning that literally goes back centuries.

Rather than finding the idea that our (behaviorist?) differences with constructivists are depressing, I actually find the centuries-old debate uplifting. It tells me that constructivists are not just obstinate fools, but are actually shaped and supported by long-standing philosophical assumptions and schools of thought. That being said, we (behaviorists) do hold differing assumptions about human behavior and child learning, and we do need to abide by those assumptions and actively engage in discussion and debate and to change the culture that we believe impedes student learning.

We all know the old joke about how many psychologists it takes to change a light bulb. The light bulb has to want to change. In clinical psychology, behavior change is considered to be predicated on effective treatment *and* a therapeutic alliance. Behavior analysts have not given enough attention to the construct of therapeutic alliance, but I believe that there may be mechanisms of behavior change based on scientific behavioral principles that are potentially necessary in an individual's "want" to change and in facilitating treatment adherence. There are three components that have been identified as essential to an effective therapeutic alliance: (1) agreement between parties (i.e., clinician and client; consultant and consultee) on treatment goals, (2) agreement between parties on the process/tasks of treatment to achieve the goals, and (3) a positive affective bonding or relationship between the clinician and client (Accurso, Hawley, & Garland, 2013). One can easily see parallels of this in the implementation science work of NIRN that Karen Blasé presented and in George Sugai's work with PBS.

In many ways, the science of building a therapeutic alliance was the topic of our summit. It is not enough that we have effective treatments and educational programs to implement; it is also important that we agree on goals and process, and that we like each other. Certainly with respect to the large scale of philosophical approaches to human behavior and development and education, we (constructivists and behaviorists) do not agree on goals and process and if any relationship exists at all, it is certainly not a positive affective bond. In this scenario, behavior (and culture) change is doomed.

So, the problem we were addressing is centuries old and likely insurmountable. What do we do?

It is important that we continue to actively and forcefully participate in the long-standing discussion and debate about human behavior and child development and learning. But recognize that changing hearts and minds will likely only happen one individual, one group, one school at a time rather than at the larger societal level. We need to make sure that we recognize and celebrate our successes. There are many! Successes that immediately come to mind include positive behavior supports (PBS), HeadSprout,

Morningside Academy, direct instruction, FBA in IDEA, the notion of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and measurable goals and objectives, personalized systems of instruction, implementation science, and many, many more. We must recognize that it is necessary and important to occasionally "preach to the choir." We must directly address arrogance and tactless attacks within our community against those behavior analysts who work with the larger community of constructivists and others. We must continue to be involved in undergraduate and graduate student training to help bring others into the fold. For example, I love having student perspectives at the Wing summit meetings and suggest bringing in more students in the future, or maybe even having a separate summit targeted to students.

In short, the Wing Institute (good people, good food, good wine) is the answer to this long-standing, seemingly insurmountable problem. The Wing faculty/fellows consistently engage in all of these important actions toward building and reinforcing a culture of evidence-based practice and slowly changing a dominant culture of constructivism. They bring like-minded professionals together to reinforce the good works that are being done and shape future work to be done. Culture change will not happen in our lifetime and we have few of the necessary components in place to make it happen, but we are making progress thanks to the Wing Institute and all the professionals it has brought in over the years to address issues of evidence-based practice in education.

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Post Summit Commentary

Random Thoughts Occasioned by Stimulating Discourse at the 2014 Wing Institute Summit
George Sugai
Ver. 29 April 2014

Comments on lessons learned (acquired, shaped, and positively reinforced) from the experiences and outcomes of the Wing Institute.

1. Sticking to our fundamentals or basics.
    a. Pat Williams (2014): *Coach Wooden's Greatest Secret*.
    b. Implementation fidelity, sustainability, and scalability are related to a solid foundation in the basics: (i) theory of action, (ii) essential features and actions, and (iii) specification of the outcome.
2. Considering theory and theories of action.
    a. Easy to chat among those with a common vision, common language, and common experience. How do we engage in meaningful, outcome-oriented conversations with those with different vision, language, and experience?
    b. Agreement across disciplinary and conceptual perspectives is possible on many practices; however, little reconciliation and compromise are possible with respect to fundamental mechanisms for specifying, prioritizing, and achieving kid outcomes.
    c. Having a defendable theory of action is about maximizing the likelihood of describing, explaining, and making decisions about phenomena, actions, and results in a parsimonious, defendable, replicable, and disseminatable manner possible. Stated another way, differences between perspectives might be a matter of degree and context and might increase the degree of compromise and agreement; however, fundamental or core principles or assumptions that define and distinguish a theory may cause compromise and middle ground to be unattainable.
3. Increasing uptake or adoption of an innovation, practice, position, perspective, etc.
    a. We must model the same values, expectations, practices, and systems that we suggest are not being adopted and demonstrated by others.
    b. We are responsible for documenting and demonstrating what we are asking others to do and invest in.
4. Achieving durable and scalable systems change and implementation.
    a. What is the smallest thing we can do that will have the most meaningful, defendable, durable, and reinforcing outcome? Can we explain the mechanism for achieving that outcome?
    b. Phases of learning may enhance our implementation decision making: acquisition, fluency, maintenance, generalization, and adaptation (White, Haring, & Liberty, 1980).
5. Preparing personnel.
    a. Teacher preparation can be competency-based and mastery-oriented; however, agreement about criteria and rules for defining, teaching, and evaluating competencies may be difficult.

    b. Initial and continuous professional preparation and development may be our most important point of influence for changing culture, maximizing implementation, and achieving effective, efficient, and relevant organizations. For school as the unit of analysis or consideration, school leadership (distributed) may be the center or hub of preparation and implementation efforts (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).
6. Providing technical assistance.
    a. Responsiveness to technical assistance varies by learning history (i.e., positive and negative reinforcement and positive and negative punishment).
    b. To assess learning history, a function-based approach should be adopted.
    c. Tiered response to intervention approach should be applied to effecting change in adult behavior. Most individuals can be convinced with a generalized approach. Some individuals will need a bit more convincing. And a few individuals will need more intensive, individualized assistance to convince.
7. Increasing our emphasis on outcomes.
    a. Outcomes must be developed as powerful conditioned reinforcers for the practices and systems that are associated with those outcomes.
    b. Documenting, disseminating, and making overt our outcomes are important to reinforcing our efforts, practices, and systems. We would not ask medical professionals to change their terminology, language, and procedures to improve our interaction with them at the sacrifice of outcome.
8. Using data.
    a. Information or data are essential to inform all aspects, phases, and conditions of implementation.
    b. However, evidential data vary in importance, form, function, and utility based on theoretical perspective.
    c. Even no data are data!
9. Considering culture.
    a. Culture is defined as a group of individuals whose verbal and overt behavior represents a shared learning history (reinforcers and contingencies) that differentiates one group from another and predicts future behavior.
    b. A positive school culture is the outcome of members of an organization who develop a common learning history with respect to valued outcomes, means and forms of communication, and operating routines and experiences.
    c. Positive relationships are the conditioned positive reinforcer outcomes of mutually positively reinforcing behavior exchanges between individuals.

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Post Summit Commentary

Susan Wilczynski

> "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."
>
> - Immanuel Kant (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals,* 1785)

When was the last time you said to yourself, "Wow, I would really like to hang out with that idiot …the one who thinks I'm ignorant and foolish. I'm so glad he is always pointing out that instead of helping young people on Earth, I am actually wasting most of my waking hours due to my incompetence. I just love the way he judges me. Thank God he knows absolutely everything!"

I am fairly confident that no one on in the history of civilization has engaged in this kind of verbal behavior. The described person would be a conditioned punisher, and we would naturally avoid/escape both the person and any verbal behavior of this nature.

Yet we (I mean both behavior analysts in general and we summiteers in particular, myself included) often describe teachers who hold the constructivist view with contempt. Many non-summiteer behavior analysts are outright hostile to these teachers and we, having recognized the role of culture in changing behavior, merely demonstrate a bemused exasperation. Thinking the contrast between our "enlightened" selves and these other behavior analysts is meaningful to the constructivist teacher as an act of self-deception. So, let us not pat ourselves on the back for our open-mindedness and instead begin focusing on how to improve our relationships with these teachers.

In the book *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict* by Donna Hicks with a foreword by Desmond Tutu, you may find some useful materials if you can push yourself past the touchy-feely language. The author defines dignity as "…an internal state of peace that comes with the recognition and acceptance of the value and vulnerability of all living things" and goes on to say,

> …when we feel worthy, when our value is recognized, we are content. When a mutual sense of worth is recognized and honored in our relationships, we are connected. A mutual sense of worth also provides the safety necessary for both parties to extend themselves, making continued growth and development possible.

Sure, it is touchy-feely, but I read this as, "When we engage in verbal and non-verbal behavior that reduces physiological heterostasis resulting from a learning history rich with pairing of a given actor and punishment, we increase the future likelihood that socially meaningful behavior change will occur due to automatic reinforcement." I find I can work with this.

One of the most fascinating things I observed at this year's summit was the number of people who suggested we could dupe these hapless rubes by parroting back a few of their own values or truncated versions of their philosophical assumptions. The implication was that actually listening to what they had to say and looking for commonalities was not an important step because we already fully understood their preposterous views. When commonalities were identified, they were viewed purely in terms of values (and these were limited); no effort was made to consider methods, commitment, and the shared sense that despite our best efforts, we have not always produced ideal outcomes as commonalities. Perhaps it is just because I am reading Dr. Hicks's book at the moment, but it did seem we were not affording the constructivist teacher dignity. As a result, we did not consider the premise that creating a stimulating environment in which a child takes action, experiences consequences, and learns as a result of this sequence is a shared reality.

By respectfully acknowledging this commonality in both view and method, I believe we are more likely to make "continued growth and development possible." This is not to suggest that the differences are irrelevant, but simply that affording the many hardworking and disrespected teachers dignity as a foundation for bi-directional communication and mutual need to grow is worthwhile. Could any of this result in behavior change, though? I work in autism, which I concede is a different world than general education (or special education, broadly speaking). But still my thoughts turn to Pivotal Response Training (PRT) as a possible example of finding a middle ground. In PRT, you do follow the child's interest (to capitalize on motivation), but you embed a concentrated dosage of specific teaching trials into the learning environment. I would not remotely call PRT constructivist, but I know a lot of teachers who view it this way based on their observation of my autism program in the 2000s. I believe a sincere and comprehensive exploration of our commonalities is essential before we can produce the behavior change we seek. In the end, if we have not changed teacher behaviors, it is because we have not created an environment that supports this behavior change.

A final thought: I completely agree with Bryan Cook's assessment that we may need to hire marketing specialists to more effectively communicate about our "product." But let's not simply hand over the responsibility for marketing to a specialist without realizing that marketing must go hand in hand with sales. Creating a catchy slogan that captures the attention of constructivist teachers will only open the door. The salespeople need to "close" the deal, and no amount of marketing can override the experience of sellers who cannot effectively describe the value of their product or, worse still, think the customer on the showroom floor is so far beneath them that understanding the desires of the customer is not a good use of their time. We are the salespeople and we will improve our bottom line only if we are good at this task.

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