

# Teacher to Teacher

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**Achieving Success through Nature's Common Medium – The Human Brain**

By Millie Harris  
DoDEA 2001 Teacher of the Year  
Fort Benning, Georgia

During my twenty-one years of teaching culturally diverse students of our nation's soldiers, I have found that children are more alike than they are different. Whether students are Hispanic, Asian, Native-American, Caucasian, or African-American, they are capable of outstanding achievement when expectations are high and instruction is effective. Whatever cultural backgrounds may be, a universal truth is that children's brains are wired in essentially the same way.

In my exploration of how the extensive neuro research of the past ten years is being applied today, I visited the first-grade of Mrs. Barbara Culwell, a strong proponent of brain-compatible learning at Stowers Elementary of Fort Benning, Georgia.

Classrooms like Mrs. Culwell's are a far cry from many of the past, when the teacher served as the "drill and kill" dispenser of knowledge. I observed many brain-compatible practices such as these: a safe leaning environment in which risk-taking and original ideas are valued; skillful questioning that elicits higher order thinking; varied learning styles and multiple intelligences incorporated into instruction; physical needs of students addressed, including water, snacks, and movement to ensure optimal learning occurs; explicit expectations in weekly assignments; a variety of interesting academic choices for free time; integration of technology into instruction; parent volunteers who bridge the home/school connection; student-made

rubrics for metacognition; classical music during creative writing; hands-on math manipulatives; songs to commit learning to memory; and, cross-curriculum instruction that links varied subjects.

I witnessed man-made boundaries of race, culture, and economics being broken through nature's common medium – the human brain and a teacher who cares enough to shatter old myths.



**In This Issue:**

Achieving Success through Nature's Common Medium - The Human Brain  
Millie Harris.....Front Cover

Global Learning  
Betty Garren.....p. 2

Stepping Out of our Comfort Zone  
Jennifer L'Esperance.....p. 3

New Millennium Challenges  
Deborah Ingersoll.....p. 3

Across the Curriculum and Across the Grades  
Joan Thomas .....p. 4

Reflections on Teaching  
Paula Pierce.....p. 4

It Takes a Village  
Mary Ann Hardee.....p. 5

Teacher to Teacher Editorial  
Millie Harris.....p. 6

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## Global Learning

By Dr. Betty Garren  
2001 South Carolina  
DDESS  
Teacher of the Year



As one of the 1998 recipients of the William J. Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Awards, I had the privilege

of spending three weeks in Tokyo and Hiroshima, Japan studying the Japanese culture and their education system. This study visit, fully funded by the Japanese government, provided me keen insight into the culture of this wonderful Asian nation. It also instilled an intense desire to share my new knowledge with the faculty and 650 students back home in my workplace, the Laurel Bay Primary School.

As an Enrichment Teacher servicing the entire student body, I knew I could develop many interesting lessons to share my experiences. The parents of most of our students are in the Marine Corps and many of them spend their six-month deployments in Japan and Okinawa, so the culture was not completely “foreign” to the students. Soon after beginning my series of lessons, I read of an organization in Japan (International Internship Program) that places Japanese teaching interns into American schools for up to one year. One of the purposes of the Japanese Teaching Assistant Program is to provide aspiring young Japanese teachers the opportunity to visit and live in the United States. The program places teaching interns in American schools where they share their culture through language, music, art, and interaction with the students. The intern is not paid for his/her services to the school. The host teacher makes housing arrangements for the duration of the intern’s stay and provides transportation to and from school every day. The only cost to the school is to provide a free lunch every day. In my case, I recruited 4 different teachers (including myself) to host the intern in two-month spans. Imagine the excitement the first morning that Miss Yukiko arrived at our school! Students and faculty alike were excited and welcomed her into our school family. Everyone in our school and many throughout the community learned Japanese culture, language, songs, stories, foods, games, and dance.

Students dressed in traditional Japanese yukatas (summer, cotton kimonos) and happi coats. They learned to eat with chopsticks and to write in calligraphy. A favorite activity was the art of origami (paper folding).

Miss Yukiko had dreamed of coming to America since she was a little girl. She studied the English language for eight years and was 21 years old when she became our intern. She taught us much about her country, but she also learned much about ours. Highlights for her included: meeting Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus, seeing her first Christmas parade, experiencing all the American holidays of which she had only read, attending a New Years Eve party and dancing with a boy for the first time, traveling from South Carolina to Florida on the Intracoastal Waterway in a sailboat, and living with four different American families.



Our year with Miss Yukiko is one that will be with us forever, for she touched the hearts of all! Students, parents, and faculty alike knew Miss Yukiko, for she was in the dinner conversation of every student she had seen that day. Our Japanese teaching intern experience was truly an experience in global learning.

Information about the International Internship Program may be obtained from...  
email: [inqus\\_ca@internship.or.jp](mailto:inqus_ca@internship.or.jp)  
or website: [www.internpro.com](http://www.internpro.com)





### Stepping Out of Our Comfort Zone

By Jennifer L'Esperance  
2001 Heidelberg District  
Teacher of the Year

One of the pleasures of being Teacher of the Year has been being able to attend several conferences. I attended conferences for Teachers of the Year, School/ Home/ Community Partnership, Assistant Principals, and finally the ASCD conference in Boston. Several important themes and topics kept recurring throughout each conference. Our students come from diverse backgrounds and family situations. This makes our jobs infinitely more challenging and difficult. The one size fits all education is not adequate for students who will live in an even more diverse and unusual era. Teaching as we all know is not easy or "neat". It reflects life in all its difficulties and "messiness". This also provides an opportunity for us to engage the challenge and thrive in trying to meet the diverse needs of our students and their families. The good news is research has some phenomenal insights in to how the brain learns. Brain research was a hot topic and I was fortunate enough to listen to cutting edge experts in this field. There are methods we can easily implement that will help our students key in and remember what they learn. The call is out for differentiating and using current research on learning and the brain. We have to educate ourselves if we hope to meet this challenge. I encourage every educator to study the new brain research and differentiating models that are currently abundant in professional literature.

I also discovered that I have had to step out of my "comfort zone" and promote my profession in very visible and vocal ways. I used to think that doing the best job I could in my classroom was all I needed to do to be a credit to my profession. I know now that is not enough. Once we are through with our introductory years of learning the profession, it is our duty to promote what we do each day.

We are the conduit for future professionals and our contribution and efforts are vitally important. How many times do we complain instead of promoting what we do? We need to support each other and realize that at the end of our day we've done important work not only for our society, but also for each individual child we touch. I encourage each of you to not only promote our profession publicly, but also personally support educators with whom you work through encouragement, professional growth, and new approaches.

### New Millennium Challenges

By Deborah Ingersoll  
2001 Italy District  
Teacher of the Year



During America's brief history, we have become the greatest nation in the world. We have conquered flight, developed a polio vaccine, placed a man on the moon, performed heart transplants, maintained our freedom and democracy, and have made unbelievable advances in technology, unparalleled by any nation in the world. Our education system has been primarily responsible for our country's successes. In the new millennium, teachers will be challenged to build upon the established high standards. Teaching will become more complex. Parents will become more demanding. We are headed for yet greater strides.

I believe I will be prepared for the challenge of this new century because in the past I have been effective in my role as a teacher and friend to my students. I challenge them as we work together to make their learning fun, exciting and relevant. I am a strong advocate of actively involving children in the learning process and acknowledge and reward their success. I encourage them to try. Trying leads to creativity and helps to decrease their fear of failure. I once heard that if one touches a child's heart and shows them genuine care,

*Story continued on page 5*

### Across the Curriculum and Across the Grades

By Joan Thomas  
2001 Kaiserslautern District  
Teacher of the Year



Those who would like engagement ... excitement... cooperation... discovery... to be a part of their next lesson should try teaming-up with a class of older or younger students for some cross-age peer mentoring and let the joy of learning with a buddy begin.

Teachers can start by asking a colleague at another grade level to partner with his or her class, with the initial meeting during the first few weeks of school. This helps the children know that this is a program built into their curriculum right from the start and that they will enjoy all year long. Students should spend time during the first meeting just getting to know one another while working on a fun activity together. Middle school students have helped my first grade students with keyboarding and spelling by typing a few sentences together about themselves in the computer lab. They have assisted them in making individual books on fall thematic units during the opening weeks of school.

Frequent meetings between schools help youngsters establish bonds and build friendships. The mentors feel a true sense of accomplishment when they contribute to their buddies' academic and social progress over the year. The younger children get a glimpse into the exciting future that lies ahead in their education when they visit their big buddies' school. A whole new world was opened up for my first graders when they looked into the microscopes in our high school buddies' biology class this year.

The older students acquire real ownership in the mentoring program when they help to plan the activities. By cross checking curriculums cooperating teachers can identify and coordinate similar areas of study. Mentors can use their in-depth knowledge in a content

area to enrich and extend the younger students' understanding of concepts in science, technology, social studies and math. Our buddies have created presentations on insects, taught our class how to use a book-making program, provided the musical accompaniment at our Flag Day Ceremony, and devised some fun ways to teach first graders how to count coins.

Everyone benefits from the mentoring experience. The older students see themselves as role models and teachers, as they share valuable skills and offer encouragement. The younger students receive extra one-on-one support and have opportunities for more extension activities. Consider making this the year to buddy-up with buddies to enrich our student's learning environment.



### Reflections on Teaching

By Paula Pierce  
2001 Turkey/Spain/  
Islands District  
Teacher of the Year

Being named Teacher of the Year for the Turkey/Spain/Islands District has been an honor and a privilege, but also a time of deep reflection for me. I have had the opportunity to think about what my beliefs are about good teaching and my own personal philosophy of education.

When I began teaching, right after my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, I thought I knew all the answers, even being foolish enough to buy a sweatshirt that boldly stated, "I know all the answers. I'm a teacher." I found that I knew my content but I didn't know about children, that I couldn't fix the problems at home, that I couldn't be a surrogate parent, and that children don't learn well when they are hungry or fearful. That first year I learned never to try to be a parent to my students, but to be the best teacher they ever had.

Later, when teaching 4<sup>th</sup> graders, I learned that communication is an essential key. One *Story continued on page 6*



### It Takes a Village

By Mary Ann Hardee  
2001 Fort Bragg DDESS  
Teacher of the Year

**H**olbrook Elementary School at Fort Bragg is a neighborhood school with a mission. In spite of the high mobility rate, the teachers at Holbrook are committed to DoDEA's goal that by 2006, 75% of all students will be in the top two quartiles in reading... and all students by third grade will be reading at grade level. The teachers will be the first to admit that they cannot do this in isolation. It takes a village...

Linda Smith, Holbrook's principal, is actively involved in Holbrook's curriculum. She fought hard to achieve an uninterrupted literacy block each morning for the students in first through fourth grade. As the four block literacy program was adopted last year, that uninterrupted time became a keystone for the continuity required for success. Mrs. Smith brings her science background into the formula each year by adopting a theme for the school. During the 2000/2001 school year, every class, from the three year old pre-kindergarten group to the fourth grade classes, studied spiders. Mrs. Smith was in every classroom, leading the charge and teaching lessons about spiders. During the 2001 - 2002 school year we will be exploring the 4 B's: bees, beetles, butterflies and bugs. She also interacts with the students regularly, checking their math facts. As Holbrook's leader, she listens to what the teachers say they need in order to maximize student progress and she does her best to back them. It takes a village...

Classroom teachers have cheerfully sought out and adopted the four block balanced literacy approach to language arts instruction. They have sought training and resources, and collaborated to refine their approach. They have lowered the walls between classrooms, allowing for some student mobility to meet individual needs. It takes a village...

Special area teachers spend part of each day in classrooms, testing, remediating, and enriching. The guidance counselor pulls a group of fourth graders each morning to enjoy reading activities. The art and PE teachers can be observed working with individuals or small groups during the literacy block. The information specialist helps with assessments and small group projects. It takes a village...

Parent volunteers and military partners are also an important part of the equation. It takes a village...

Perhaps you have heard about the farmer who had the prize-winning crop of corn. He generously shared his seeds with other farmers on neighboring farms. When asked why he would do this in such a competitive market, he wisely observed that when the wind blows, the pollen from his neighbors' fields pollinates his corn as well as theirs. If they are raising the very best corn, it will make his crop better. So, likewise, in sharing and working together, we can expect the very best progress to be made with our students. I hope you will all reach out and be active members of your "village" this year and have the very best school year!



### New Millennium Challenges, *continued from page 3*

acceptance and respect, that person would be remembered. I stress to my students what was once taught to me as a young child, "Do not always walk in the path of others. Be unique, create and walk in a path of your own."

September 13, 2001

Dear Fellow Teachers,

By the time you receive this newsletter, the pain of this week's horrific events will still be with us, but will have ebbed somewhat with the passage of time. We as teachers of the children of our nation's soldiers' have a daunting task ahead of us. We must lend comfort and security to our students whose parents will likely be placed in harm's way. We must help these youngsters hold onto the fact that in the middle of all the horror and confusion, the world is really a very good place with good people in it. We must be determined more than ever that our classrooms become more than just sanctuaries for skills, but places where we teach and practice tolerance, acceptance and respect for people and ideas different from our own. It is imperative that we maintain professionalism by uniting in our common mission. As we join together in support of our president, we must also unite in support of our school leaders. We may not agree with every decision that President Bush or our administrators make, but we may not also be privy to all the facts. Our responsibility to our students is simply too great to be diverted by internal strife. Einstein once said, "Great spirits have always met opposition from mediocre minds." Instead, let us uplift our leaders' great spirits as they work for the common good of all. Let us rise to our universal calling by helping our children reach for hope, rather than cling to despair. I thank all of DoDEA for giving me the splendid opportunity I have had this past year to work for making a positive difference. I am especially grateful to all my wonderful friends and colleagues and to Dr. Dell McMullen, our exemplary superintendent at Fort Benning, for their unwavering support. God bless this great nation and the outstanding professionals I am privileged to know.

Peace and faith,  
Millie Harris  
DoDEA 2001  
Teacher of the Year



**Reflections on Teaching**, continued from page 4

day, after assigning research projects on insects, my principal called me to the office to answer a parent complaint that I had stood her child in front of the room and told the whole class that he had lice. He had neglected to tell his mother that I had also announced that two other students had ticks and fleas.

I learned to teach to each child. The year after the Gulf War, when teaching first grade in Bahrain I had a little Kuwaiti boy whose family was one of the wealthiest that I had ever seen. Although he had three different nannies, one to walk him to school, one to walk him home, and one to take him swimming, he was clinging and very demanding. Although my first reaction was that he was a spoiled little rich kid, I later found out that his mother was dying of cancer and receiving treatment in France. The Iraqis had kidnapped him and his sister as they were fleeing Kuwait, and it had taken several weeks before his family recovered them. Knowing the background of this child changed my attitude towards him and the strategies that I used to reach him.

The last thing I learned is a good teacher needs to be flexible and to have a good sense of humor. In 1990, in Bahrain, during the build-up for the Gulf War, right in the middle of the war zone, teachers spent their free time going to the field hospital to learn how to wear a gas mask. When the war began, the school closed, but the teachers reported for duty each day. Most of the teachers banded together and found ways to cope with a life-threatening situation. They made up silly songs just to have something to laugh about, such as "Leaving Kuwait is Hard to Do," and "I Left My Heart in Downtown Baghdad." This was the highest definition of support and collegiality, using humor to help through a very trying time.

Teaching is the most wonderful profession in the world. To enjoy this job, however, one needs to realize that we learn from everything and everyone around us. We need to see the children we teach as individuals, take time to listen to them and learn from them. We all need to laugh a little more and enjoy this wonderful job we have been blessed and called to do.