

# Relevant Brain-Based Education: What, Why, How, When?

## Our children and curriculum development today

As educators we often sift through a maze of curricular decisions, mandates and options with our students' minds, skills *and* academic lives partly in our hands. Within this reality of critical curriculum decision-making, it seems vital for learning communities to plant firm roots in the strongest and most effective curricular and content frameworks and practices possible. While some students are always going to fly through school with consistently "exemplary performances" regardless of what and how they are taught, others will always struggle - especially in more traditional settings where a higher level of relevant brain-based learning, purposeful content and classroom best practices have not been reached. This brief curriculum position paper stands firmly in support of relevant brain-based learning. It is our hope, upon reading, that you will firmly embrace it as well. If not, the question would be - why not? That's how important we believe relevant brain-based learning is - and we think you will too.

## What is brain-based education?

In essence, brain-based education begins with us, the educators, finding out everything we can about how the brain learns (neuroscience), then applying this to the development of purposeful curriculum and the facilitation of exciting learning. This includes knowing more about meta-cognition, bio-rhythms, learning styles, multiple intelligences, the role of emotion, student strengths, content relevance, global histories and realities, neuroplasticity and the power of positive thinking. Starting with ourselves, brain-based education means believing in the ability of every mind, especially younger minds, to learn new things, succeed in great challenges and fully enhance one's own intelligences, creativity, purpose and production. Brain-based education is all about unlocking every brain - including our own - to the potential we hold for self, community and global improvement. It is, *to be frank*, mental liberation. It is not, *to be more frank*, an over-emphasis on teacher-directed lessons, standardized tests, textbook work, lectures, ditto sheets, individual competition, or rote memorization.

## What does relevant brain-based learning look like?

To some, brain-based learning means incorporating new computer programs, more kinesthetics, a few more art projects and certain differentiations between students. While all of these are of use - and are backed by brain-based research - it would be too simplistic to view brain-based learning solely as "integrating" these and other well-meaning strategies into our classrooms. Essentially brain-based education, in our view, revolves around five central tenants: **1)** content relevance and importance; **2)** student involvement in decision making and curriculum shaping; **3)** the recognition and consistent implementation of multiple learning styles; **4)** thematic and integrated learning with chances for deep, critical, creative connection making; and **5)** purposeful student performance / production to present their learning *and* improve and/or construct new realities. As David Sousa, a leading voice for brain-based education and author of *How the Brain Learns* (2006) explains, "helping students to make connections between subject areas by integrating the curriculum increases meaning and retention, especially when students recognize a future use for the new learning."

## What might your next steps be? Learn more to teach better.

- Gain a **deeper knowledge** of brain-based learning and education - maybe starting with *Sousa* (see above).
- Conduct a **comparative analysis** of your main teaching styles, methods, and curriculum with brain based learning.
- Learn more from **your students**, families, and communities (i.e., their strengths, skills, realities, interests, prior knowledge, justice-minded passions, hopes, fears, and more).
- Tap into **local educators** facilitating exciting and meaningful projects / learning experiences with students.
- Learn more about **the world your students face** and how they can help change it (whether head on or from the periphery) - including issues of community, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, government, poverty, housing, environment, health, criminalization, corruption, immigration, abuse of power, human rights violations, war, famine, food deserts, animal cruelty, and so much more!

## References:

Sousa, David A. *How the Brain Learns*. 3rd ed. Melbourne, Australia: Sage Publications, 2006. Print.