

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Some say society (we) are coming apart at the seams.

Some say we need better stress management.

Some say we need more love of neighbor.

Some say we have a compassion crisis such as “Doctors say medicine should be more caring” (Stacey Burling of the *Philadelphia Enquirer* in the April 1 2018 MACON.COM).

Some say we need to take action, such as identifying with a hashtag group; eg. #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter or #NeverAgain.

Some say we need to examine our societal institutions, in such areas as education and work ethics.

In this edition of our Fore(In)Sight newsletter **Truth Seekers** we read about some ideas of two of our Fore(In)Sight advisers, Alec Ostrom and George Braucht. We appreciate their offering their perspectives on our world views.

George suggests that we get a copy of the professional or organizational code of ethics that informs our work and 2) our organization's vision, mission and values statements . For those of you who identify with Fore(In)Sight as one place you work, you might want to review our

Fore(In)Sight's primary purpose is to provide a variety of communications that are intended to increase the happiness and well-being of individuals and our society in which they function. The communications are specifically directed at enabling each person to understand his/her basic potentials, as related to pertinent environmental factors, and the optimal education, vocations, marriage, morality beliefs and use of time relevant to these potentials. To this end we convey ideas designed to reduce NEEDLESS PAIN, SUFFERING AND DEATH in the world, particularly that which is due to nonphysical causes that we refer to as being BEHAVIORAL. We perceive the production of positive behavior and the prevention of negative behavior to intimately related, for they involve behaviors, particularly those which are due to nonphysical causes.

Can you can join us at our May 2018 Seminar? (see the information at the end of this newsletter.)

Sandra C. Lewis, Ph.D.
Editor

The Realities of Negative Stress with Our Children and Young Adults

By Alec I. Ostrom

On February 14, which was, ironically, both St. Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday this year, we witnessed a horrific school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, which resulted in the deaths of 14 students and 3 staff members, and the wounding of several other students and teachers. This is but one example of the high levels of negative stress that our children and young adults must endure these days in our K-12 public schools. So we must ask ourselves: What are the causes of all of this negative stress on our children and young adults and what should we do about it?

As a retired educator I know first-hand what our students are experiencing each day in our K-12 public schools and in private schools and charter schools for that matter. Our children and young adults are forced to struggle each school day with the following kinds of negative stress:

1. The organizational systems of our K-12 schools are obsolete factory assembly lines of education. They are one-size-fits-all organizations where virtually all of the students must learn the same academic content in the same way, at the same rate or pace, and on the same time schedules. There is no capacity for personalized, individualized, customized human learning.
2. The core academic subjects (English/language arts, Math, Science and History/Social Studies) are taught in disconnected subject areas that are focused on disconnected chunks of information. From 2002 until 2015 these chunks of information were called the *No Child Left Behind* federal academic content standards. Then starting in 2010 the NCLB standards were revised and replaced by the Common Core State Standards. The CCSS essentially revised the NCLB standards and pushed them downward so that what students used to learn in the 5th grade they now must learn in the 3rd grade and so forth.
3. The daily schedules of our K-12 schools are compartmentalized into short blocks of time and learning is segmented into disconnected learning activities. Typically the students learn Math for 40 to 90 minutes; then they jump to English; then they jump to History; and then Science, P.E., etc. Nowhere in the adult world is learning done in this manner.
4. In our middle schools and high schools the students must learn to deal with 4 to 6 or as high as 8 different teachers each day. Just consider how adults would respond to having 4 or 6 or 8 different bosses or supervisors each day. And then each semester the students have to learn to deal with 4 or 6 or 8 new teachers.

5. The daily schedules in our schools are constantly interrupted with other activities (pep rallies, canned food drives, fire drills, lock-down drills, activity days, intervention schedules, school-wide announcements over loudspeakers or CCTV programs, minimum days for teachers' staff training, etc.), and individual classrooms are constantly interrupted by the delivery of call-slips to send students to see a vice principal or a counselor or the nurse, etc., teacher e-mails, phone calls to the teachers, etc.
6. Approximately 40% of the students who are struggling with the core academic subjects are labeled "learning resistant students" and they are assigned to "intervention courses" where they are immersed in more of the same kinds of learning that didn't work for them in the first place. And these "intervention courses" take up space in their daily schedules so they cannot take elective courses that are of interest to them.
7. And last, but certainly not least, the students are forced to endure standardized teaching processes that are 95% direct instruction (mostly lectures) to "cover" the CCSS standards and the teachers are forced to teach specific numbers of standards each day, each week, each month, each quarter and each semester. The result is that there is virtually no time for in-depth discussions, student questions, or time to help students individually. And at the end of each year the students must then engage in 3 to 5 days of standardized testing. But guess what? The students and parents don't receive the standardized testing scores or results until 4 months later at the start of the next school year. Standardized teaching and standardized testing violate all of the principles of sound pedagogy and they reduce teaching that is engaging, motivating and effective.

In the past 20 years or so we have had some excellent research assisted by the use of PET scans, CT scans and MRI scans that has informed us as to how the human brain physiologically learns at optimum levels.⁻¹ And we have also had some excellent research on the psychological and emotional conditions in which the human brain learns at optimum levels.⁻² In summary what these studies tell us is that the human brain learns, retains and masters knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors when learning happens in conditions that are personalized, individualized, nurturing, safe, supportive, engaging, motivating, challenging, relevant, meaningful and value-added *as perceived and experienced by the learners*. Also, students learn best when they perceive and can immediately use or apply what they are learning to real-life problems, processes, relationships or projects. Together these conditions and applications are all about the *positive, creative, challenging, productive stress* that all human beings need and require to grow, develop and engage in lifelong learning.

The hard truth is that our present K-12 schools are essentially sink holes of negative stress. Our children and young adults are continuously subjected to conditions, situations, processes and working relationships where their brains and their psyches are bombarded with negative stress and deprived of positive/constructive/challenging stress. And when we add in increasing numbers of school shootings is it any wonder that our children and young adults are stressed out, depressed, not achieving, dropping out and in some cases even committing suicide? It is indeed nothing short of a miracle that some of our students do succeed as well as they do *in spite of* all

of the negative stress that they must endure each and every day. And we must also note and profoundly thank our K-12 teachers who are working very hard to teach, support and protect our students in working conditions that are filled with negative stress and dangerous physical and psychological realities.

Notes:

1. Sources of research on how the human brain physiologically learns at optimum levels:

<https://www.pageuppeople.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Neuroscience-of-Learning-and-Development1.pdf>

<http://www.apa.org/education/k12/brain-function.aspx>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC314395/>

2. Sources of research on how the human brain psychologically and emotionally learns at optimum levels:

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine_things_educators_need_to_know_about_the_brain

<http://www.apa.org/education/k12/brain-function.aspx>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5573739/>