

# **A TEACHABLE MOMENT**

**A FRAMEWORK for EDUCATING**

**in a**

**TIME of STUDENT EMPOWERMENT**

**Dr. Jack Tierney**

**Excerpts from Keynotes & Presentations**

## A Teachable Moment

The “teachable moment” has been a staple of educational belief for generations, the idea that circumstances may present a moment in time when the student is optimally ready to learn.



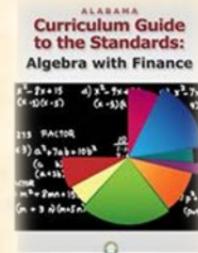
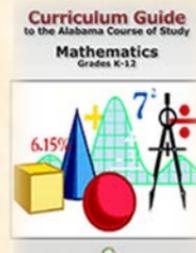
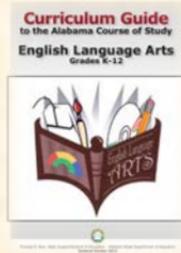
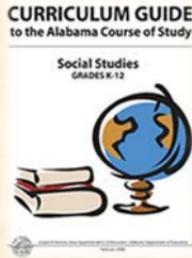
Like all “moments,” teachable moments are brief, fleeting, and rarely line up with lesson plans. *This* is such a moment for students across the nation; they are ready to learn! They are needing, wanting, and asking how to live in a time and place where kids die in schools! There is virtually nothing in traditional curricula that prepares young people for such events. How then, should we, teachers and educators, respond to this extraordinary and literally life and death teachable moment?

*How do we teach these kids?*

## TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH...THAT IS THE QUESTION

For many of us (maybe all of us), how, what, where, and when we teach is prescribed in curricula.

*And, we are expected to deliver!*



So, when those extra-curricular “teachable moments” come up, and they very frequently do, we need to make a decision. The needs of the learner “in the moment” must be weighed against curricular goals and objectives. And, for many of us (although not all of us), the needs of *this* moment, “a time and place where kids die in schools,” vastly outweighs any and all “curricular goals and objectives.”

## FRAMEWORKS, STRATEGIES & TOOLS

We are in what has often been called “unchartered territory.” When venturing into uncharted territory, it is helpful to have some frameworks, strategies and tools to help navigate.

Teachers always apply instructional “strategies” and use teaching “tools” within some kind of structure or “framework”...that’s what we do.

When traditional frameworks, strategies and tools are inadequate, we must conceive, design, and develop new ones.

And so, we offer here a beginning...a **framework** for teachers and educators to design, develop and implement new strategies that genuinely respond to the needs of an empowered student population.



## A BRAIN-BASED FRAMEWORK

The totality of life may be summed up in one word...experience!

And for humans in particular, experience is a function of the brain.



And so, we base our framework on what we know  
(what science has told us) about the human brain.

We know the brain responds to the environment by sensing its characteristics.  
Information is perceived through our five external senses and relayed to the brain.

When our senses detect something of emotional significance, that information is first  
“evaluated” by the brain in a small, almond-shaped organ near the base called the  
Amygdala. It is at that stage of experience that our framework begins.

## MR. SPOCK AND CAPTAIN KIRK

Star Trek fans will recall many episodes where the logical Mr. Spock and the emotional Captain Kirk were locked in heated debate, often shaking their heads at the foolishness of the other's positions.

For virtually the entire history of modern education, it has been Mr. Spock who has guided and directed practice and pedagogy.

Until recently, emotion was often considered an impediment to efficient thinking, planning, and acting, especially in the STEM subjects.

There is compelling evidence that we should give more heed to Captain Kirk.

**Emotion**, not thinking, **may be the key** to educating in a time of student empowerment.



## FEELING & DOING

Feelings [emotions] are an unstable psychological state.

Emotions demand resolution...that we *do* something...that we *act*!



Sometimes, action [doing] will immediately follow emotion [feeling].

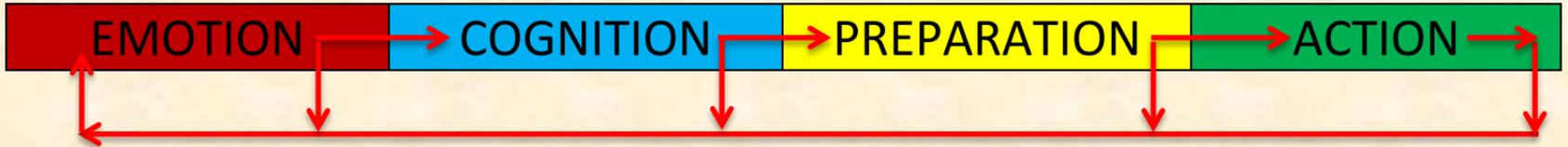
When it does, it may or may not be beneficial to the individual. Someone may take a very bad action driven by a very good emotion.

It is helpful, therefore, to put some space between feeling and doing, between emotion and action.

And in that space, we see two crucial steps: **thinking and preparing.**

## EBB & FLOW

While it is helpful, we think, to discuss these ideas about emotion, cognition, preparation and action somewhat sequentially, it is important to keep in mind that there is a dynamic characteristic that puts all the elements in constant ebb and flow with each other. Emotion influences thinking; thinking influences emotion; emotions and thinking influence preparation; preparation influences emotion and thinking; emotion, thinking, and preparation influence action; action results in emotions and the cycle continues.



## THINKING & COGNITION



We can think of “thinking” [cognition] as kind of a catch-all word for some very complex mental processes: attention and perception, memory and recall, judgment and evaluation, reasoning and computation, problem solving and decision making, and the production and comprehension of language...to mention a few.

When all these mental events have taken place, the result is a system of **beliefs and assumptions** by which we make sense of the world.

If we want to change someone’s thinking, we need to find a way to change their beliefs and assumptions. We do that, not by telling folks that they are wrong, but rather by providing the opportunity to examine those beliefs in the light of scientific research. Beliefs that hold up under scrutiny will be reinforced; those that do not will be replaced.

## **BELIEFS & ASSUMPTIONS**

Children come to us full of naïve beliefs and assumptions, thinkers for whom the boundaries of fact and fiction are very blurry, and for many of whom such boundaries continue to be very blurry as adults.



Our job as teachers and educators is to bring clarity; to shine the light of knowledge on “alternate” facts, “fake” news, and “post-truth” commentary, and to empower students with empirical facts, real news, and truthful commentary.

These are the tools they will need if they are to influence [“change”] the thinking of lawmakers and of society in general, and replace beliefs and assumptions that have created the current situation with beliefs and assumption that may lead to something better, kinder, and more human.

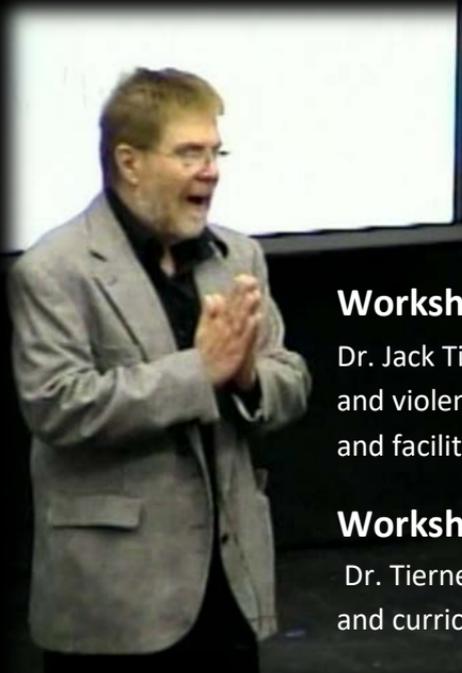
## PREPARATION & ACTION

Preparation is different from emotion and cognition in that, as we prepare to act, we begin to externalize mental events on their way to action.



When a young person writes the words “Stop Killing Us” on a homemade sign and another “Don’t shoot!” on her hands, it is a natural extension of an emotion (fear), thinking about the implications, and needing to do something. Driven by fresh and painful emotions, thoughtful discussion, and strategic planning, they have taken to the streets in the thousands demanding responsible social, civic, and moral leadership from adults.

They must be well prepared to face the daunting challenges that lay ahead. And this, teachers and educators, is our job, to prepare students to face the daunting challenges that lay ahead...the real ones! If we teachers and educators can respond to the deep and almost universally shared feeling and emotions driving student empowerment, we can model the kind of responsible social, civic, and moral leadership kids are demanding.



## **Presentation/Keynote: Educating in a Time of Student Empowerment:**

In this engaging keynote/presentation Dr. Jack Tierney describes his four-step “FEEL – THINK - PREP – ACT” framework for educating in a time of student empowerment drawing on research and focusing on “big ideas” and “do-able” applications.

## **Workshop I: Educator Beliefs / Articulation and Consensus Building:**

Dr. Jack Tierney engages educators in active discussion around salient issues such as: school shootings and violence, student activism, curricular vs social responsibilities, belief systems, brain-based learning, and facilitates consensus building on school-based responses.

## **Workshop II: Designing for Student Empowerment: Activity/Lesson Development:**

Dr. Tierney guides educators through the process of designing standards-based learning activities, lessons, and curricular modifications that empower students to speak up and participate in civil society.

## **Workshop III: Facilitating Student Empowerment: Programs and Methods:**

Dr. Tierney summarizes recent research and program development and facilitates planning, preparing, and supporting school-sponsored social-conscious student activity.

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