

“Best Practices”

Submitted  
To  
*Civil Air Patrol National Headquarters*  
2 November 2004

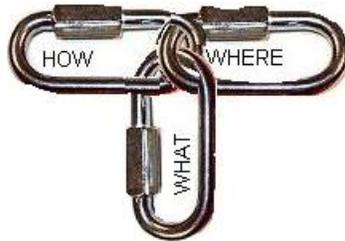
By H. Leland Smith  
Major, CAP

PhD Candidate

University of Southern Mississippi

Defining best teaching practices is an exercise analogous to describing the shape of a single cloud in a thunderstorm. The description is possible but not definitive. The purpose of this paper is to explain “Best Practices” as currently understood within an educational context. An appropriate description of the contemporary usage of the term “Best Practices” is successful action(s) within a relatively small and well-defined community.

A review of the literature provides the opportunity to visualize a triad of interlocking actions on which “Best Practices” rests. That triad may be pictured as links of connected chain labeled what, where and how. Connected chain is used rather than a fixed triangle because, while the links need to remain connected, each link needs to have maximum movement within the other links to provide the strongest basis for instruction.



The first link is what. What manner of material is being taught? Is the class a required class or is the class an elective? Is the lesson theoretical and subjective in measurement or immediately applicable (hands-on) and objective in measurement? The second link is where. Where is the location for the delivery of the material being taught? Does the teacher have a physical location in which to teach or is the instruction occurring in a virtual classroom? The third and last link is how. How does a teacher learn to deliver material required to satisfy students, syllabi and the measured outcomes of the class? Prima fascia evidence indicates that “how” is potentially the weakest link of the triad. Instructor training courses often are concerned with a singular presentation

technique. This is acceptable using the active duty model because of the captive audiences and only subject matter experts (SME) are authorized to be instructors. Only when the instructor is extremely familiar and comfortable with the material to be presented, can that instructor successfully present with confidence that the course outcomes will be accomplished. Far too many courses are taught by any volunteer willing to read from a text. CAP instructors need to be SME. Fully trained SME can learn to make effective presentations. Extrapolating, effective presentations make courses worthwhile and give members reason to maintain membership and to potentially recruit new members.

Critical thought is required to thoroughly examine the links of the triad. Obviously, literature reviews provide the opportunity for the reviewer to interpret and report findings in a manner that support the reviewer's bias. A "Best Practice" weakness found prevalent in the literature is the lack of investigational rigor applied to the reporting of that "Best Practice". Primarily, given the same circumstances, can the "Best Practice" be replicated? Reasonability dictates that teaching practitioners desiring to provide "Best Practices" need to explore and test various methodologies to fit a student's best learning styles and the teacher's best teaching style. Just as a comedian may be able to get a great laugh from one audience and fall flat with the same joke with the next audience, a teacher must continually test the water to establish a continuum of "Best Practices" within the curriculum to match the student's needs. To that end, the following series of annotated bibliographies is presented that lay the foundation for reason and understanding "Best Practices".

Brookfield, Stephen D. (1987). *Developing Critical Thinkers* Milton Keynes: Open University Press Berkshire, England: McGraw, Hill Education  
Brookfield advises that the critical thinking process affords students the ability to recognize perspectives other than their own held beliefs. Finally, through the epilogue, the educator is given some clear direction in implementing and incorporating critical thinking dialogue and questioning in the classroom. Brookfield defines critical thinking and articulates a method to help you recognize it in action. He proposes that to be critically analytical concerning the assumptions underlying our actions and those of others is organizationally and culturally beneficial. This text could be most beneficial to persons attempting to first move to critical thinking for best practices.

Charan, R., Drotter, S., Noel, J. (2001). *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass  
The authors provide proven guidance with methodologies to build leaders. Teachers are often left adrift in the areas of management, organization, and professional development (other than the advice of obtaining a graduate degree in administration). This text can provide the serious student of excellence a basis for “best practices” in professional growth and assessment. While the text concentrates on business applications, critical thinking and analysis will provide the reader with direct educational parallels.

Covey, Steven (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* New York: Simon & Schuster  
In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen R. Covey presents a holistic, integrated, principle-centered approach for solving personal and professional problems. With penetrating insights and pointed anecdotes, Covey reveals a step-by-step pathway for living with fairness, integrity, honesty, and human dignity -- principles that give us the security to adapt to change and the wisdom and power to take advantage of the opportunities that change creates. This text causes the reader to reflect upon the best personal practices and how to reach inside and cultivate these habits. When acted upon, these habits can produce positive life altering results. With these thoughts in mind, a positive, yet not Pollyannaish, individual is able to understand, connect and use the best of best practices with eyes wide open. Why would this text be included in a discussion of best practices? This text is included because Covey provides a blueprint in an incredibly important book for persons searching for excellence in practice and in life.

Drummond, Tom (2002). *A Brief Summary of the Best Practices in Teaching*  
Retrieved October 8, 2003,

From, <http://northonline.sccd.ctc.edu/eceprog/bstprac.html>

“Intended to Challenge the Professional Development of All Teachers” subtitles this treatise. The competencies highlighted are visible to self and others and consequently provide a basis for formative evaluation. Twelve areas of components for excellence are explored. The areas are: 1. Lecture Practices in way to present new information orally to fit differences in learners. 2. Group Discussion Triggers are effective ways to present a common experience to engage a group in a discussion. 3. Open-ended, thoughtful questions. 4. Reflective Responses to Learner Contribution contribute to learner’s success with nonjudgmental, anecdotal information relating to the topic being discussed. 5. Rewarding Learner Participation without contrived praise or extrinsic reward. 6. Active Learning Strategies that foster active, constructive participation. 7. Cooperative Group Assignments foster understanding of teamwork and respect for all input for problem solving. 8. Goals to Grades Connections provides a vital link to students understanding of evaluation. 9. Teacher Modeling provides the opportunity for student learning regarding listening, openness and trust. 10. Double Loop Feedback promotes the awareness of how one learns to learn. 11. Climate Setting provides both the physical and mental comfort levels. 12. Fostering Learner Responsibility means the instructor is responsible for presenting the material in a logical and learnable manner and the student is responsible for learning! This article is appropriate for the beginning teacher, the mentor or any teacher desiring to develop better professional habits.

Elsbree, Willard S. (1939). *The American Teacher* New York: The American Book Company

This classic text provides the reader with the historic basis for educational “Best Practices”. The author traces the lineage of teaching credentials, professionalism, and the evolution of methodologies from the earliest settlements of the “New World”, the revolution, the Civil War, and through the date of publication. The history of education is replete with “Best Practices”. Elsbree reminds of the circle of educational innovation with a description of the Oswego plan. Sense-perception lessons replaced boring book and oral drill lessons. Do manipulative objects sound like sense-perception? However, some very good ideas emerged from the Oswego plan based on the Pestalozzian methodology. This method placed greater burden on the teacher to prepare for instruction. Objects had to be selected to for purpose and meaning, instruction had to be organized in advance, and teachers had to be sure the words and context used were understandable by the children being taught. A great text in which to find real meaning in “Best Practices”.

Gerber, D., Carter, L., and Goldsmith, M. (2000). *Linkage Inc.'s Best Practices in Leadership Development Handbook* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer

The author's principle goal of this text is to provide the reader with a recipe of world-class ingredients to devise successful leadership development programs. A teacher or administrator could truly learn from this text because very few, if any, in-service programs focus on leadership. The authors use a case study approach. This practical approach provides benchmarks to successfully implement a leadership training program. Each case study provides in-sight into problem analysis, developing competencies, identifying appropriate candidates for leadership development, designing the leadership development program, implementing the program and evaluating the program effectiveness. Any teacher or administrator could truly benefit by reading this text.

Grant, J. and Richardson, I. (1997) *What Teachers Do When No One Is Looking* Peterborough, NH: Crystal Springs Books

This text is in a comic book style that may have one-hundred-fifty imprinted words. Yet the authors manage to remind teachers that "best practices" extend far beyond the classroom. As teachers, each action taken in public is scrutinized; each student or parent spoken to in the grocery store is a public relations act and are reminded that unblemished character is essential. Perhaps the best use for this little tome is an in-service reminding teachers of the special obligation to expect excellence from students by providing excellence in teaching and community service.

Hinds, Drew (2003) OETC New Century Schoolhouse. *Instructional Technology Best Practices* pgs 2 & 15. Retrieved February 21, 2004 From: [www.oetc.org/newsletter/winter%202003.pdf](http://www.oetc.org/newsletter/winter%202003.pdf)

The author describes best instructional practices that include instructional technologies. The author makes clear that instructional technology exists to enrich activities already occurring or to facilitate activities that could not have occurred without it. The author further makes clear that technology, in and of itself, does not provide instruction to any student. Teachers must still teach for students to learn. The author provides a good checklist for "Five Best Practices for Classroom Management and Community Building with Instructional Technology". These include: 1. Clear expectations for teachers/students using technology (Acceptable Usage Policy); 2. Clear expectations for technology enhanced learning outcomes and projects (Rubric or Scoring Guide); 3. System for insuring equal accessibility to technology (Sign-up or Ticket); 4. Technology used as a tool for inquiry and higher order thinking (Inspiration, Kidspiration, Webquests and Presentation) 5. Technology as a tool for connecting students to authentic learning experiences and primary resources (JASON and Global School House)

Johnson, Spenser (1998). *Who Moved My Cheese?* New York: Putnam  
The author provides a marvelous coterie of thought regarding change. The story is a thought provoking parable regarding a pair of mice and a pair of "little people". Johnson brings to mind the very essence of human reaction to change with his use of cheese to represent what is desired and the maze as a way to fulfill our desires. Classroom or professional discussion can be easily generated by the revelation of sudden and unexpected change encountered by the mice and little people. How change can be handled with a minimum of stress can be the outcome of applying the principles of this text.

Mahoney, Jim (2002). *Power and Portfolios: Best Practices for High School Classrooms* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann  
The author sets forth the premise that portfolios are a driving force in student motivation and growth. The concept states that students become most proficient when challenged and motivated to work with the teacher as that teacher develops a theme in a public way, such as on an overhead. In a business setting, portfolios provide a building block model to reflect improvement and talent in writing and researching. This text provides the teacher with a methodology to determine whether the most appropriate way to implement this type of project.

National Centers for Career and Technical Education. (2004). *Exemplary and Promising Programs* Retrieved February 4, 2004 Author.  
From, [http://www.nccte.org/exemplary/practices/in\\_use.asp](http://www.nccte.org/exemplary/practices/in_use.asp)  
This comprehensive article defines fifteen grouped categories of outstanding practices. Any instructor teaching skills or technical education will be able to use this article to insure program direction and delivery. Each of the definitions is broad enough to be applied under many circumstances but definitive enough to provide specific measures of success. Each group defined is linked to a program designated as exemplary or promising. An outstanding feature of this article is the diversity of experiences cited combined with the applicability of those experiences. This is an outstanding article for any instructor looking to refocus, retool or reconfirm current methodologies.

Nellen, Annette (2001). *Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness: SJSU Academic Senate Retreat – October 12, 2001*. Retrieved February 11, 2004 From, [http://www.cob.sjsu.edu/facstaff/nellen\\_a/EvaluationTeachingEffectiveness.htm](http://www.cob.sjsu.edu/facstaff/nellen_a/EvaluationTeachingEffectiveness.htm)  
Any instructor interested in portfolios needs to read this article. The author provides a treasure trove of resources to accomplish quality portfolios that have usefulness to the portfolio maker. Readers are provided an insight to effective teaching and best practices through diverse evaluation processes.

Olzendam, Alison (2003). *The Brain, Instructional Practice & Technology*  
Presented to the Instructional Technology Strategies Conference held at  
the Eugene Hilton, Eugene, OR January 2003. Microsoft PowerPoint  
(PPT) presentation Retrieved January 18, 2004 From:  
<http://www.oetc.org/itsc/brain.html>

The author presents an interesting array of thoughts on teaching and learning. While this PPT presentation is a skeleton around which a complete presentation was made, each segment causes the viewer to want more information. The author provides foundations for professional development or in-service programs that would have to engender lively discussion leading to better teaching and ultimately best practices.

Peters, Thomas J. and Waterman, Robert H. (1982). *In Search of Excellence*  
New York: Harper & Row

This classic business text provides the reader with a blueprint of best business practices that can be applied to nearly any setting that involves human decision making. The applicability of this text to educational or to classroom settings is provided through acknowledged parallel experiences. While the experiences may be anecdotal, this does not make them any less valid. For example, many corporate trainers use the latest management trend to “motivate” managers. Parallel in an educational setting is administration jumping to whole language to the exclusion of phonics or new math set theory vs. traditional math using a 10 base. Additionally the authors argue that managers are often stymied through exclusion from the decision making process. The parallel in the classroom setting is most teachers are excluded from any decision making processes. This text provides a model for an exemplary district if best corporate practices are paralleled within an educational context.

Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R. and Smith, B. (1994). *The Fifth Discipline Handbook* New York: Doubleday

Senge provides the reader with models of success within diverse working world situations, including education. Applications of basic and common sense solutions are pervasive throughout this 572 page tome. No experimental, whimsical, or trendy methods are presented as courses of action for problem solving. The authors provide most interesting anecdotes that support various contentions through the text. A teacher who wishes to devise a best practice, or who believes a better, best practice can be devised, would be well advised to peruse this text. The authors could well keep the reader out of harms way while problem solving.

Shulman, Lee S. (1998). *Course Anatomy: The Dissection and Analyses of Knowledge Through Teaching* Retrieved February 15, 2004

From, [http://www.oswego.edu/nulti-campus-msf/course\\_anatomy.htm](http://www.oswego.edu/nulti-campus-msf/course_anatomy.htm)

Shulman, President, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, packs a punch with the statement "...I have to ask myself what I know that is worth teaching..." This powerful article articulates the processes necessary to shape and improve the teaching process. When instructors are top notch with content and delivery skills, then best practices can evolve. Shulman is an advocate of portfolios. Portfolios provide a historical record of process, success and failure. Shulman believes the use of portfolios provides a method to replicate successful and best practices.

Stinnett, T. M. (1968). *Professional Problems of Teachers* New York: The Macmillan Company

The author provides a comprehensive text for both beginning and veteran teachers facing the problems of improving quality teaching. Stinnett provides the reader with a macro view of practitioner excellence. The reader is presented with the opportunity to learn and sustain the "best practices" of professional teaching practices. The author reminds the reader that many teachers act only as professional as is demanded by the public. Again, this text is a good source of history for determining the tolerance of administration and community members for excellence and "best practices".

Stone, Randi (2002) *Best Practice for High School Classrooms: What Award-Winning Secondary Teachers Do* Thousand Oaks, CA Corwin Press

An interesting compendium by teachers who have won recognition for classroom practices. This text provides an instant network of exemplary teachers sharing insights and expertise derived from the agony of trial and error. What the text reveals, as presented, is that best practices evolve from specific needs within a particular discipline or subject area. The reader is reminded that few global best practices exist. The text is nevertheless an excellent starting point for a new teacher or a great source of ideas for the experienced teacher open to new ideas.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2003). *Best Practices*

Retrieved December 9, 2003,

From, <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/disca/title1/ti8.html>

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) provides macro applications of where and how portions of "Best Practices" can be accomplished. Seven characteristics are identified comprising a successful school. A hyperlink connection to the WINSS Best Practices page provides the department's ideal of a model for each of the seven characteristics. These characteristics are (1) vision, (2) evidence of success, (3) high academic standards, (4) family, school and community partnerships, (5) standards of the heart, (6) professional development, and (7) leadership. Perhaps the most telling feature of this article is an aside from the title, "Knowing what a successful school is and being one are two different things."

Zorn, Diane (2003). *Balancing Teaching Tensions* York University (Canada), Centre for the Support of Teaching Retrieved: February 13, 2004 From: [www.yorku.ca/cst/res/tensions.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/cst/res/tensions.htm)

The author cites an article approximately 14 years old concerned with teaching issues still unresolved. These are the 5 problems (tensions) listed by Maryellen Weimer in the May 1990 issue of the AAHE Bulletin: 1. getting grades vs. getting learning; 2. having the answers vs. asking the question; 3. intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation; 4. covering the content vs. teaching the material; and 5. being in control vs. taking risks. Any teacher at any level should read this article. The reader will gain an insight to methodologies and resources not normally associated with best practices. The author is a teaching assistant (TA) who draws inspiration from Brookfield.