

from **The Fort Frances Times**

## **Educators Learn How To Train Brains**

FORT FRANCES - With a little training, anyone can boost their brain power and improve memory. That was the message keynote speaker Brian Thwait's delivered to a group of educators at the Townshend Theatre here yesterday during the Rainy River District School Board's Summer Institute 2006.

Thwait's is a professional speaker and "brain trainer" with more than 25 years of teaching experience.

"If somebody doesn't want to know something, nothing's going in," he said, speaking of both adult and young students. "We have to try to develop some kind of desire to learn things, if we can." The trick is to make the material interesting and easier to digest. This can be done through visual cues.

"Brains are very visual," Thwait's noted. For example, a list of 20 objects is easier to remember if you visualize each item rather than trying to simply remember the words. "Facts and figures and words and numbers don't stick easily to brains," he explained.

Another strategy is to make the material emotionally engaging. "Anything that has emotional content will automatically stick to the human brain," Thwait's said, citing his 90-year-old grandmother as an example. When visiting her in the nursing home one day, she couldn't remember what she had eaten for lunch. Yet she could tell him in precise detail about the day she met his grandfather—right down to what they wore.

"When your brain is attached to your heart, it works better," Thwait's remarked. As children get older and progress through the education system, "learning tends to get more and more passive. "The more passive the activities, the more unsuccessful they probably will be," he warned. For example, adults taking classes often have large amounts of reading. With dry material, most people begin reading and find they have to re-read several paragraphs as their eyes only glanced over the words without taking in their meaning.

Some ways to avoid this are to use highlighters, make notes in the margins, take notes on a separate piece of paper, or repeat important information out loud. "You have to take that information and do something with it," Thwait's stressed. These strategies help move information from short-term to long-term memory.

"Your brain will improve with age, if you use it properly," he continued. Thwait's encouraged activities like crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, and bridge to help keep the mind active. He also stressed the importance of physical health and an active social life in keeping your brain sharp.

Following his keynote address, Thwait's offered a workshop to teachers on "Smart Ways to Use Your Brain."