

Summer 2014

Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian
Association of School System Administrators

Association canadienne des gestionnaires
de commissions scolaires



Engaging Students – Making a Difference

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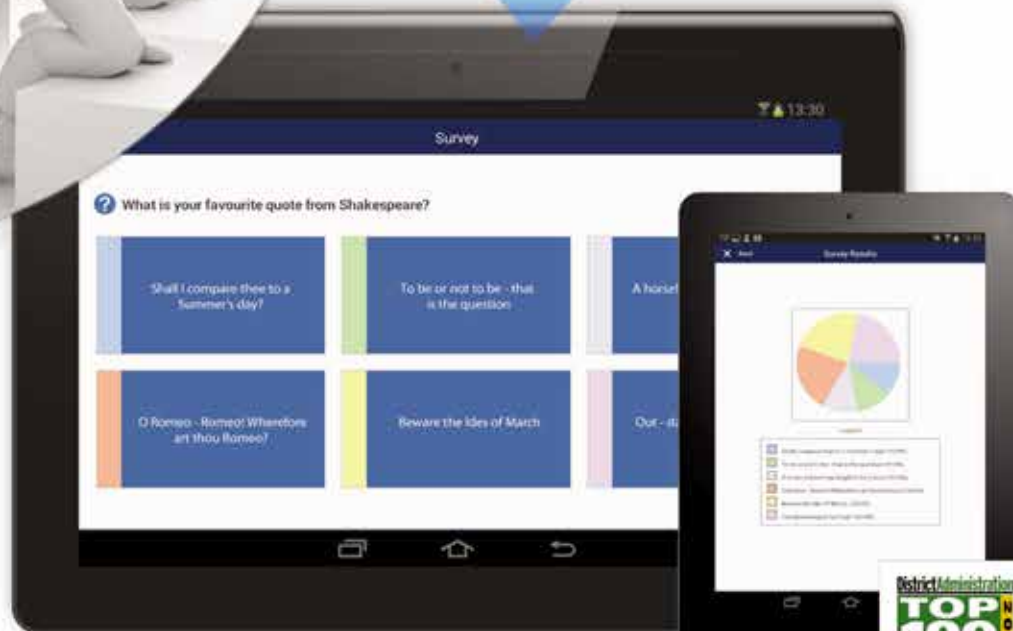


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Research into Practice



Ontario Leadership Framework 2012, With a Discussion of the Research Foundation, directed by Professor Kenneth Leithwood, provides the research foundation underlying the design and revision to this leadership resource.



Strong Districts and Their Leadership, 2013, commissioned in partnership with CODE, provides comprehensive research to support districts in reviewing their leadership development plans.



Ontario Leadership Framework - A School and System Leader's Guide to Putting the Ontario's Leadership Framework into Action, revised: September 2013. This guide will assist school and system leaders to effectively implement the OLF.

Development:

The *Safe and Accepting Schools Project* presents various strategies, knowledge and experience to ensuring safe and accepting schools.

For more information on the OLF and other resources, visit the IEL website at:

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L'Institut de leadership en éducation de l'Ontario (ILE) est une organisation virtuelle qui :

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La recherche en action



Le Cadre de leadership de l'Ontario 2012 : une discussion relative aux fondements de la recherche, dirigé par le professeur émérite Kenneth Leithwood, présente la recherche sous-jacente à la conception et à la révision de cette ressource liée au leadership.



Le rapport de recherche : *Les conseils scolaires et leur leadership*, commandé en partenariat avec CODE, présente des recommandations visant à orienter les conseils scolaires dans l'examen de leurs plans de développement du leadership.



Le cadre de leadership de l'Ontario : Guide à l'intention des leaders scolaires et des leaders du système pour la mise en application du Cadre de leadership de l'Ontario, révisé en septembre 2013. Ce guide permettra aux leaders scolaires et aux leaders du système de faire une mise en oeuvre efficace du CLO.

Développement :

Le projet sur les écoles sécuritaires et tolérantes présente des stratégies, des connaissances et des expériences qui permettront de rendre nos écoles sécuritaires et tolérantes.

Pour obtenir de plus amples renseignements, visitez le site Web de l'ILE au :

www.education-leadership-ontario.ca

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W

elcome to the spring edition of our magazine with its continued focus on student engagement. Our Winter 2013-2014 issue and Summer 2014 issue of *Leaders & Learners* both have content aligned with the theme of our summer conference, *Engaging Students – Making A Difference*. In the articles that follow, as well as at the conference, CASSA members will get an opportunity to read and hear about

what their colleagues are doing to more fully engage students in their learning.

Engagement of the learner is so critical to the learning process that it has been referred to as the “Holy Grail” of teaching and learning. One widely utilized definition of student engagement comes from the work of Phil Schlechty (1994), who identified three characteristics of students who were engaged:

1. They were attracted to their work;
2. They persisted in their work despite challenges and obstacles; and
3. They took visible delight in accomplishing their work.

When asked through feedback loops, such as student surveys on engagement, respondents generally noted that work they were good at that stimulated their curiosity and allowed them to express their creativity was rated as more engaging. Conversely, respondents disliked work that was repetitive, required little thought, or was forced on them by others.

Learning environments can be dynamic settings that launch dreams and delight minds, or arid places that diminish hope and deplete energy. I’m sure all of us, reflecting on our own educational experience, can identify such settings. Readily accessible information in our hyper-connected world provides virtually unlimited opportunities to make teaching and learning more engaging. However, brain research suggests corresponding neurological changes in brain development which make engagement more challenging. Today’s students have a very low threshold for boredom, so energy and passion matter.

We must win students’ hearts and minds by engaging them in whatever subject we teach, so they can discover genuine meaning and value in their academic experience. Energized, passionate teaching that connects students to real life problems fosters learning, while sedentary, monotonous teaching sabotages engagement. Goodlad (1984) concluded that the typical classroom possessed a “flat neutral emotional ambiance where . . . boredom is a disease of epidemic proportion.” Now, more so than ever, if we as educators bore this generation, they will abandon us.

The sheer number of presenters at our conference highlighting specific projects designed to promote engagement is indicative of the focus on engagement across Canada. In Alberta we have a new *Education Act* that will come into effect September 2016. We are focused on fostering the three E’s, Engaged Thinker, Ethical Citizen and Entrepreneurial Spirit, in all students. Engagement is mentioned three times in the preamble to the act. One of the corporate responsibilities of boards, as well as a specific responsibility of individual trustees, is to “provide, where appropriate, for the engagement of parents, students, staff and the community on board matters.” Certainly here in Alberta the focus on engagement will only increase as this new legislation comes into effect.

To conclude, in writing this message, I was reminded of the old adage, “Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.” Educators are fortunate in that we work with our youth and the vast majority of our days are exciting, stimulating and engaging. I trust you will enjoy the stories captured in this edition of our magazine.

Enjoy the read!



Roger Nippard
CASSA/ACGCS President

Learning environments can be dynamic settings that launch dreams and delight minds, or arid places that diminish hope and deplete energy.

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reetings on behalf of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) and its Board of Directors! I want to begin by sharing some of the most recent changes to our organization:

- CASSA has a new logo, one that reflects our Canadian identity and our commitment to students and their learning (you can see it on the cover!);
- CASSA has a renewed purpose. CASSA is the Canadian association of school system leaders that promotes and supports quality education for the success of all students;
- CASSA has a renewed mission. CASSA strengthens the capacity of school system leaders and influences the directions that impact education and student learning; and
- CASSA has entered into partnerships with two organizations (Starthrower and The Change Place), whose resources and services will assist CASSA in fulfilling its purpose and mission (see the following for added details).

This year, our theme for our *Leaders & Learners* magazines AND our annual conference is *Engaging Students – Making A Difference*. This edition of *Leaders & Learners* includes a variety of articles highlighting an array of student engagement practices and programs from across Canada. The issue showcases a successful strengths-based leadership program from Yellowknife Catholic, a Destination Imagination program from British Columbia, an Edmonton Catholic program that engages students in the science conversation, a re-imagining process in Lakeshore School Division in Manitoba that engages students, parents and the wider community, and an example of how one board (Dufferin-Peel Catholic) aligns the Ontario Ministry of Education’s goals with its own strategic plans that honour the voice of students with special needs. Additional articles from Quebec, Northwest Territories, Alberta and Ontario reflect the widespread national importance of student engagement.

Member Benefits is a new section on the CASSA website. Our partnerships with Star Thrower and The Change Place are a major new benefit. Since 1996, Star Thrower has created programs that develop people’s ability to think rather than react. Star Thrower programs help institute real change, individual change that can make a fundamental difference in the way an organization or society behaves. Find more information at www.starthrower.com.

Certified POWERful Coaching for Powerful Results is a leadership development and training program for anyone who wishes to learn effective coaching skills and techniques to strengthen leadership effectiveness, boost relationships and results or become a certified coach. The POWERful Leadership Coach program leads to designation and eligibility for International Coach Federation’s Associate Certified Coach (ACC) professional coach credential. System leaders in CASSA member affiliates or individual CASSA members receive a financial advantage when purchasing services from these companies.

My thanks to the many author-contributors to this issue! CASSA appreciates the time and effort you put into preparing your articles. And of course, the work you do on a daily basis to engage students meaningfully in the lives of their schools and communities.

Best wishes for an engaging learning experience at the CASSA conference in Calgary and a safe and relaxing summer!



Ken Bain
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

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Invested in Learning: Student Engagement and the Arts

By Curtis Tye

How do students become and stay invested in learning at school? At Westview Middle School in Hamilton, Ont. staff prioritized the arts in and out of the classroom as an engagement strategy to inspire and provide opportunity to personalize learning. It fostered a culture of professional learning activated through creative arts. The school evolved into a community of artistic learners.

The Arts in Professional Learning

Staff altered their classroom activities so students were participating in arts during the day. Student engagement and citizenship emerged from intentional arts-based skill development approaches in all subjects and with school-wide initiatives. To accomplish this, first a culture of creative teaching, more specifically artful teaching, was established with staff (Van Eyk, J., 2012). Teachers examined arts-based lesson creation to broaden the appeal and level of engagement.

Integrated arts teaching and learning sessions happened at staff meetings. Monthly articles were distributed to staff. Team collaboration time began to include attention on student engagement techniques and strategies using art. This provided a reminder of the many ways students can show what they know and created the impetus to seek new ways arts could act as a vehicle for important subject material. Staff and students rely on professional learning activities that independently develop each arts discipline in committed and powerful ways.

Professional learning initiatives were designed to engage staff in

understanding the power of the arts for students and included a variety of methods to build capacity and excite staff prior to classroom implementation. One such activity was mask making. Westview's visual arts teachers led staff through a self-reflection activity. Masks were constructed with background theory, practice on mask making and follow-up commentary reflecting the many sides to their own personality and preferred mode of learning. Teachers discussed their learning and were motivated to provide it for their students. The staff said they developed a greater understanding of the effects of creating the arts and the power of arts-based learning.

Upon completion, the masks were showcased for students in the front foyer display case. Follow-up discussions looked at how we reach our students then the same activity was done with them. This work was presented in the display case next to the teachers. An artist's written statement was included with their masks to communicate the vision of their creations and clarify the connection between demonstrating a personal perspective of who they are and allowing students to share insights into their role in their school community.

The Arts in Assessing Learning

As with other subject assessment and evaluation, staff needed to become more familiar with the creative processes so they could understand what constitutes a clear demonstration of what a student knows about that concept or principle. The creative means for conducting student assessments came up in staff conversation and classrooms. Teachers were experimenting with creative instructional practices when students began asking how the teacher was to evaluate the task. Creating rubrics and checklists only partially reflected what rich responses students were giving.

As a result, the literacy teachers started a fluid co-development of the learning expectations and assessments—beyond learning goals and success criteria—of the assessments appropriate to capture the student learning. In fact, Westview staff began using the arts assessment framework from



the Ministry of Education program to reflect increased student contribution. It showed how students can assess and evaluate their own learning practices (O'Brien, 2011). Staff commented that not only were they seeing students use arts assessments to evaluate learning occurring in particular subject areas, but teachers were incorporating the student-determined assessment tools in unit planning.

Profiling students' learning expectations was beginning to allow for more in-depth understanding of students' abilities and the reason as to why students were becoming more personally invested in the classroom. Discreet and specific individual student learning could be closely monitored and analyzed in new artistic ways, allowing staff to address gaps in academic achievement. As a result, meeting discussions concerning individual students became more fruitful and fostered openness to being more creative when assessing student learning.

The arts allow students to better understand how feelings are generated and can encourage tuned-out students to become enthusiastic learners. By combining the creative arts process, school initiatives such as restorative justice, dispute resolution and social justice curriculum applications emerged as more vibrant tools to re-engage potentially at-risk students. Restorative justice practices involved extensive role playing towards not only resolving conflict at school, but also as a means to work with caring adults not previously connected to these youth.

Further, students were increasingly using artistic means to internalize their understanding of conflict in a broader sense and assist teachers in crafting curriculum activities. Several student-led activities emerged that espoused the central principles of social justice work globally. Westview students were now reaching beyond the classroom and giving voice to topics that they were passionate about. We were seeing significant gains socially as well as academically.

Creating a caring and vibrant classroom can be a challenge, but the arts provide a unique opportunity for students to address new situations and areas that concern them personally. In particular, students at-risk find the arts an important way to express themselves and the arts can be the crucial connection for these students and schools in general (Portelli, 2007). Westview students of concern found ways to connect to our school and showed increased attendance when involved with arts in classrooms and outside the classroom. Also, increased technology and opportunity to link to core subjects allowed for a dramatic increase

in media arts presentations and multi-purpose demonstration of learning by students.

The Arts in Reaching All

Throughout the process of using the arts to capture interest, various pieces of research helped guide the thinking. Staff were provided arts related research articles and text materials that demonstrated:

- Whole school arts integration (*Creating an Arts Integration School*);
- How schools have revitalized themselves through a comprehensive approach to a change in school culture (Morris, 2009); and

- Specific ideas of how particular arts disciplines and literature can be incorporated into various classrooms in a meaningful, purposeful and authentically engaging ways (Cornett & Smithrim, 2001).

Adoption of an arts-based approach systematically affected the culture of the individuals within the school in profound ways. School-wide activities have become the norm for Westview students and staff with an array of arts endeavours that foster creative learning in the arts as well as with other related areas of interest. Further, integration of the arts into all facets of school leadership and program



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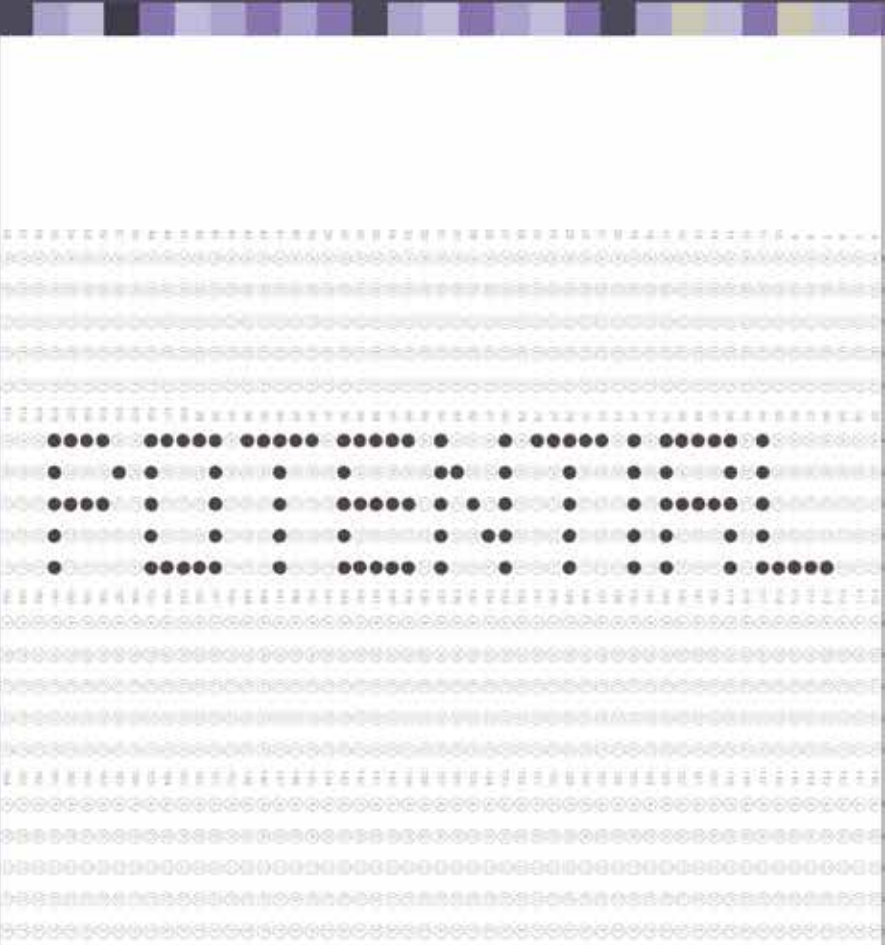
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implementation has encouraged students and staff to participate in creative engagements that allow the arts in school-wide learning.

As a result of the arts-based school enrichment focus, the principal has become more creative in organization and management of school timetables, problem-solving and decision-making practices. Teachers have become partners in the creation of rich and engaging learning tasks in classrooms and beyond, and students have become artists in their learning. The students' arts-learning skills have generated a clear, personalized voice in describing what areas of their learning need more attention, what areas of learning need less attention, and in what ways student feel they learn best.

What Does the Data Tell Us?

Over the last few years, Westview has seen a dramatic change in school climate illustrating a culture of investment in learning and the ways learning is occurring. This cultural shift has occurred in large part due to staff and students use of arts to demonstrate various teaching and learning practices. Staff identified some encouraging data that followed the introduction of the arts-based approach (as well as other initiatives) showing an ongoing positive trajectory both in academics and social development issues:

- The arts and academic success was shown through EQAO results from 46 and 54 per cent in 2007-2008 to 78 and 90 per cent in reading and writing standards 2012-2013;
- The arts affected student discipline. Suspension rates went from 106 in 2007-2008 to four in 2012-2013; and
- Increase in arts related clubs and group events from four to 11 student and staff led activities.

Through a greater understanding and appreciation about where we have travelled in our teaching and learning practices development, Westview staff and students will continue to move forward. Following the successes noted in the last several years, an intentional focus will be placed on mathematics and how the arts can foster personal growth and achievement in numeracy of each member of our school community. ○

For a complete list of references for this article, please email mcrane@matrixgroupinc.net.

Curtis Tye is Principal of Westview Middle School, located in Hamilton, Ont. He is also a doctoral candidate specializing in Educational Administration at OISE/University of Toronto.

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Do Edaezhe: Building Resiliency Among Aboriginal Youth

By Dianne Lafferty

Do Edaezhe, a Tlicho expression, describes a capable, skillful, resilient

and knowledgeable person, someone with the skills needed to survive in the traditional Dene sense. Do Edaezhe at Yellowknife Catholic Schools is a three-tiered program for at-risk students grades 1 through 12.

The objectives are to develop resiliency traits in six target areas: healthy relationships, goal setting, coping strategies, leadership skills, drug and alcohol resistance and protective factors against involvement or victimization in crime. The program has a strong emphasis on self-identity and Dene culture (see figure 1 on page 15).

Program Components

Community Liaison Support

Community Liaison Support (CLS) is designed for students with attendance issues and students who face barriers preventing full participation at school. Key to this is developing relationships between families and the school.

Mentorship

A positive adult role model in the school advises, advocates or spends time with a student. Students learn healthy relationship

Do Edaezhe students at a fish camp in February.



skills and have an advocate in the school and community.

Leadership and Resiliency Program (LRP)

The Leadership and Resiliency Program (LRP) is the third tier and main component of Do Edaezhe. It is adapted from the Fairfax-Fall Church Community Services Board LRP program and aims to enhance youths' internal strengths and resiliency while preventing involvement in substance use and violence.

The approach is based on identifying and enhancing the individual's internal strengths. The three common resiliency areas targeted are healthy relationships, goal-setting and coping strategies. All program activities are designed to promote the resiliency of students in order to help build a sense of identity from a foundation of success. LRP programming has three major activity areas:

- Alternative or adventure activities;
- Service learning or community volunteer experiences; and
- Resiliency groups.

Do Edaezhe adapted the LRP program in a number of ways, including incorporating the Dene culture wherever possible and involving students grades 1 to 8.

Alternative Activities

Adventure activities focus on traditional Dene culture. Youth explore positive risk taking while learning respect for the land and new skills. The success of these activities and the effects on students has been astounding. One teacher said, "AB is a 19 year old student who has struggled with academics and attendance during his high school career. He is a soft-spoken individual who tends to interact with only a small group of peers and a limited number of teachers. While at camp in the Barrenlands, he took on leadership roles with camp chores and activities. AB's entire demeanor changed to one of quiet pride in himself and his abilities. He was confident. AB even taught a group of students to make snares and helped them set them. I was proud to be witness to this dramatic change from a shy, withdrawn young man, to a confident, capable leader who was willing to share his expertise."

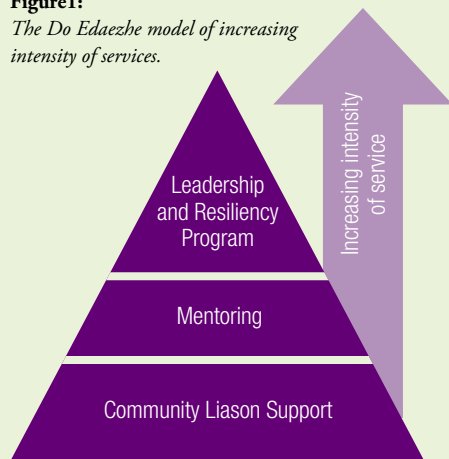
The facilitators in the program noted how it has affected their relationships with

Table 1: Leadership and Resiliency Referral/Eligibility Criteria

| School | Individual | Family/Peer/Community |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disruptive behaviour in school, such as bullying - Dropping out of school - High levels of disciplinary action - Lack of school attachment - Low educational and school motivation - Poor academic performance - Truancy: school exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aggressive, disruptive and impulsive - Anti-social and criminal behavior - Committed a crime - Convicted of a crime - Justice system – by association - Emergency mental health issues - Substance abuse/use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Association with delinquent peers - Family involvement with justice system - Family (parental and sibling) criminality - Family violence, abuse and neglect - History of mental illness in home - Inconsistent parental supervision or child-rearing - Parental anti-social behaviour and beliefs - Parental substance abuse - Poverty - Rejection by peers - Unhealthy relationships/negative peer associations - Youth in care |

students and changed the traditional educational structure of the teacher as leader, to the teacher as a learner. One teacher said, "As a facilitator, I cannot express enough how much being on the land has impacted my relationships with the students. This change in relationship continues in the school; students are more open and willing to risk new things in my class...It is empowering for students to be able accept responsibility, to share stories of elders, grandparents and families, to be proud of their heritage and who they are."

Figure 1:
The Do Edaezhe model of increasing intensity of services.



Overall, the feedback of the land-based camps speaks to the importance of connecting youth to the roots of their traditions. There is a profound impact on the relationship development in this setting.

Service Learning

During service learning activities, students work at various local organizations and become active members in community-based projects. Students are encouraged to expand their networks and develop

leadership skills. Service learning activities foster a sense of goal-orientation and altruism. Students learn about care giving, experience, self-efficacy and further develop healthy relationships with adults and peers.

Resiliency Groups

One of the keys to success of Do Edaezhe is to allow students to be the curriculum. Resiliency groups are guided by individual students' needs and therefore, lessons need to be flexible to respond to emerging

Table 2: Improvement in academic indicators for youth enrolled in Do Edaezhe

| Program | % Improved Attendance | % Decrease in Office Referrals | % Increase in Language Arts | % Increase in Math |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Attendance Watch List | 67 | 79 | 76 | 53 |
| Community Liaison Support | 53 | 80 | 83 | 62 |
| Mentorship Program | 67 | 75 | 81 | 41 |
| Leadership & Resiliency Program | 59 | 76 | 71 | 50 |

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issues and concerns. Students are taught skills around the themes of self-identity, personal safety, supports and dealing with risk factors. Alternative and service learning activities allows youth to practice the skills they learn in resiliency groups, encouraging positive risk taking and exploration.

All three components of LRP focus on all types of relationships, including with themselves, each other, adults in their lives and the community as a whole. Students see facilitators as a positive support.

- "Ms. B believes I can do it and I think I can't but she was right. I can do anything if I believe it and she was right."
- "Miss J supports by talking about what is wrong, finding me supports with other people, helping me find a better solution."
- "Miss J is always there even when I don't need her."

Positive Impacts of the Comprehensive Do Edaezhe Approach

The results of Do Edaezhe indicate an overall improvement in attendance, a decrease in the number of office referrals and an increase in academic performance, as shown in Table 2 on page 15.

Parent feedback has been positive. They are noticing a difference in relationships, leadership, goal setting and coping. Some of their comments have been:

- "My son is more focused and self-confident";
- "Self-esteem has improved";
- "More willing and likely to go out on the land";
- "She is able to talk about her feelings and choices and is willing to ask advice"; and
- "His behavior is improving at home and at school."

Staff feel that Do Edaezhe has changed the dynamics of schools in many positive ways. It offered students the chance to grow and believe in themselves in a safe and judgment free environment. It helped students develop a positive attitude about school and find a place where they belong.

Teacher and parent observations echo the experiences of youth in the program and indicate that the approach is successful. ○

Dianne Lafferty is the Aboriginal Education Coordinator for Yellowknife Catholic Schools.

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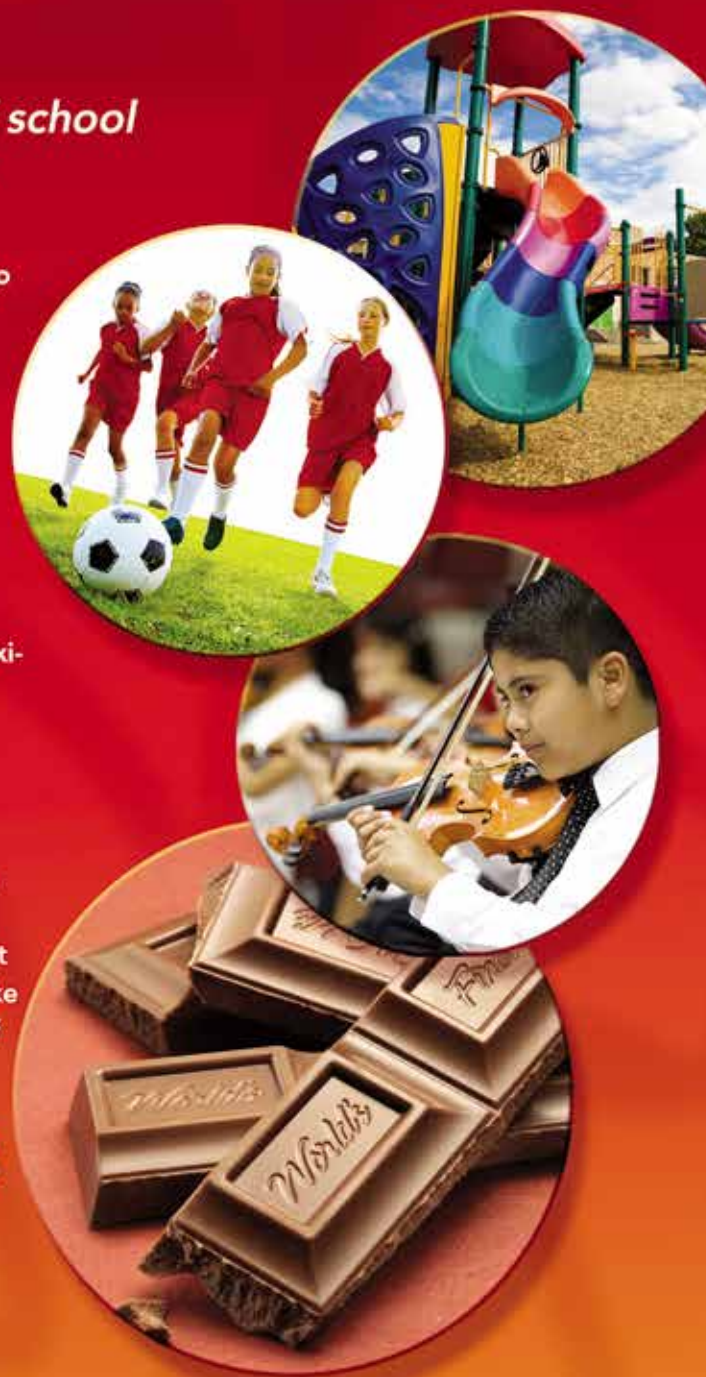


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¹ September 2010 Ipsos Reid poll of 1,300+ adults (including 500 parents of children aged 4-13).
² Survey of Nutritional Professionals. An online survey of 450 registered dietitians (RD) by the Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition.
³ "British Medical Journal", chocolate consumption and cardiometabolic disorders, 7 studies, involving 114,000 people, studies up to Oct. 2010.

Ontario Student Investment in Ngosuani, Kenya

By Katie Maenpaa

Holy Angels School's Student Council holding up the poster that they used to track fundraising progress for the Brick by Brick project.



Students at the Student Leadership Day in the fall of 2012.

Halonen and Jonathon Mayry. We recognized that we wanted student voices explicit in both the planning of the day's events and in its delivery.

Students were creative in how they raised awareness and donations for the Brick by Brick project. Some student councils invited parents to a special meeting where they shared information about the project. Other schools held dances and bake sales. Students organized wake-a-thons, pajama days, and candygram sales for Valentine's Day. But the fundraising wasn't just done on the students' part. The board office staff and many schools donated their dress down funds. Human resources officer Laureen Kay created a beautiful stained glass mirror that was raffled off in the respective communities. Parent Ray Gionet, with the help of his two children Amber and Connor, created an outdoor lantern that was also raffled off. By the end of June, the school board not only met its goal of \$8,500, but they exceeded it! A total of \$11,930 was raised.

When the student council at Holy Angels School realized that SNCDSB raised more than \$8,500, they decided to write a letter to the principals, requesting that the board work together during the 2013/2014 school year to build a water well in Ngosuani with the extra Brick by Brick funds rolling over into this project. The students had learned enough about Ngosuani to know that girls have to walk six

Together we educate, heart, mind and soul. That is the pledge of the Superior North Catholic District School Board (SNCDSB). Our ultimate goal is to have students leave our board knowing that they are empowered, capable individuals who have the ability to make the world a better place. For two years, SNCDSB has partnered with Free the Children in an attempt to give students the opportunity to see themselves as change-makers. What began as a one-year project has turned into much more!

In September 2012, SNCDSB began working with Free the Children to build a school in the Ngosuani, Kenya. The project, called Brick by Brick, saw all schools committing to collaboratively raise \$8,500.

To kick off the project, the board organized a Student Leadership Day. A few intermediate

students from all schools came together to learn about Kenya, Free the Children and the Brick by Brick project. Two facilitators from Me to We led the discussions and activities. The students were given time to brainstorm how they were going to raise awareness and donations for Brick by Brick. They took these ideas back to their respective schools where they turned their ideas into actions.

SNCDSB is located in northwestern Ontario, and although we are a small board in terms of student population, we are spread out geographically, meaning our students don't often get the opportunity to collaborate in such a manner. Alex Halonen, a grade 8 student at the time, commented that, "After attending the Student Leadership Day, I realized that there are more students like me who want to make a difference in the world." At the students' request, the board organized an additional Student Leadership Day in April, which was co-planned with and co-facilitated by grade 8 students Alex

to eight hours each day to collect water. The students wanted to help alleviate any barriers that would prevent children from attending the school they raised money to build. After reading the heartfelt letter, the principals agreed to support the well building project, which we named the Clean Water Project.

Again, the board hosted a Student Leadership Day in the fall of 2013 and two facilitators from Me to We educated our students on the importance of clean water and sanitation. Students had already begun fundraising before the Leadership Day. For example, both St. Martin School and Holy Angels School had Water Walks, where students, staff, parents and community members were encouraged to carry water a similar distance to that of the girls in Ngosvani. Impressively, we were able to announce at the Fall Student Leadership Day that our students had already raised the \$5,000 needed for the well!

We had a dilemma—we already met our goal for the 2013/2014 school year. The students at the Leadership Training decided that our board should continue learning about clean water and supporting Ngosvani, Kenya. By talking with our Educational Programmer at Free the Children, we learned that Ngosvani is in need of a block of latrines. So, at the students' request, we are now working together to build the latrines.

It has been amazing to see this project develop from an idea into something concrete. It has been amazing to see this project go from a one-year goal into something multi-year. It has been amazing to see all of our schools working toward a common goal. But what has been most amazing is to see how our students have become invested in Ngosvani and the people there. The students are making a huge difference and they know it.

In a letter to principals, the Holy Angels student council wrote, "Brick by Brick has made us realize how many leaders we have in our board and it has given us a chance to realize how lucky we are. Not only are the children in Kenya gaining from this, but so are we. We've learned so much about the struggles others face and how we can help be the change."

We're excited to see what is next. For updates about the Clean Water Project, like the Superior North Catholic District School Board on Facebook: www.facebook.com/sncdsb. ○

Katie Maenpaa is the eLearning contact for Superior North Catholic District School Board. Follow her on Twitter @kmaenpaa30.

*"This project is an amazing way to engage students by bringing in a global perspective for our students in a way that lets them learn that their voice can and does matter – that every person can make a difference, no matter how small."
– Kim Figliomeni, principal and parent*

*"I felt excited last year when we raised enough for a school. Now many young lives will get the education they truly deserve."
– Ivy Nelson, Grade 7 student*

*"I think we've accomplished something as a school board; I feel like we've made a big difference in Ngosvani."
– Mackenzie Clark, Grade 7 student*

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Destination Learning for the 21st Century

By Gerald Fussell



Two Isfeld Teams at this year's DI Provincial Tournament in Richmond, British Columbia. One finished second in the Structural Challenge and the other third in the Fine Arts Challenge.



This Isfeld team finished third in the province at this year's Provincial Tournament in the Fine Arts Challenge.

Destination Imagination¹ (DI) is a program that encourages students to think critically, develop their creative thinking skills, communicate privately and publicly, and collaborate on multiple levels. It is also a program that helps students develop grit and resilience.

In DI, there are several entry points.

Team Challenges

These challenges are issued every September, one in each of the areas of science, technology, structural engineering, fine arts, improvisation, and social outreach.² Teams of up to seven people solve a challenge. They work together over several months to create the best solution. At tournament time their solutions are appraised. The ultimate tournament is referred to as the Global Finals, where teams converge on Knoxville, Tennessee to compare their solutions with others. In 2014, more than 1,400 teams from 42 states, six provinces, and 16 countries attended Global Finals.³

In doing these challenges students learn to collaborate, not only solving the set challenge, but also the myriad of problems that arise along the way. Students learn to communicate with one another in a productive, effective manner. They develop technical skills and learn how to learn, look at challenges from many perspectives, and think creatively and critically about challenges and potential solutions.

Students who participate are enthusiastic when describing the value of DI to their learning and school experience. Does that mean that it's without conflict, strife, tears and struggle? Absolutely not. That is one of the values of the program.

Instant Challenges

These are similar to Team Challenges, other than the teams do not know the task in advance. An example might be they have to use three straws, two pieces of paper, five elastics and two feathers to create a structure to move a feather the furthest. They have three minutes to do this and create a one minute story about how the feather came to be in this projectile predicament. Whereas the Team Challenge is worked on in detail for months, the only way for students to improve their work in Instant Challenges is to practice more Instant Challenges cognizant of their creativity, critical thinking, team work and communication skills.

For the out of school program, scores at the tournaments are derived 75 per cent from the Team Challenge and 25 per cent from the Instant Challenge. However, we have had considerable success with moving Instant Challenges into the classroom. Students generally are enthusiastic to participate. The learning and deep skill development become by-products of their rekindled passion to learn and challenge themselves. This is true for the whole gamut of students. Quickly, many of our traditional stars come to appreciate what other students can offer.

Classroom Version

Pearson Canada and DI have partnered to see if the program can translate into the classrooms.⁴ Chuck Cadle, the CEO of DI is on the strategic council for the partnership for 21st Century Skills.⁵ The program, launched this fall, is presently targeted to students in grades 3 to 9. It uses the Team Challenges (20 with five being added each year) and Instant Challenges (50 with more

being added annually) to meet learning outcomes in curricula across Canada.

As we recognize the need for our system to adjust to meet needs, we must find ways to do things differently. DI provides an engaging and meaningful way for students to learn the skills they need.

Why do we not embrace such a beneficial program? Money, elitism and time.

Money

With respect to the Team Challenge program, in British Columbia, BC Gaming and the Ministry of Education have provided all team registration fees of about \$150.00 per team. Tournament costs vary, but DI is a not-for-profit organization and the tournaments we have attended cost about \$7.50 per student, with the exception of Global Finals which our school district pays for.

Transportation to these tournaments could be where the costs climb. Because our district values this program it provides transportation for all teams to attend the Provincial Tournament in Vancouver. Instant Challenges are free, except for materials which can be found in most dollar stores and recycling bins. The classroom version is projected to cost about \$3 per student each year.

Elitism

There is a misconception that this is just for gifted and talented students. This is not true as our strongest teams have been comprised of students with diverse backgrounds. Many of our successful teams have had students who struggle with school. This program has students with diverse needs working toward a common goal without glossing over the realities and the challenges that exist.

Time

Granted, like any extra-curricular activity, time is needed for the teams to learn and grow.

Conclusion

So, why are more districts not participating in DI?

I think it is mostly because it is human nature to be afraid of the unknown. Despite its history of success and thousands of participants (200,000 students this past year in 31 countries), many are unsure about what DI is and what it takes to be successful. With DI, the best way to learn is to roll up your sleeves and figure it out as you go. It is messy, but richly rewarding.

Because our superintendent and our school board have supported this work, in four years we have gone from having one trial team (affectionately and appropriately named *Cannon Fodder*) to having more than 1,000 students in our district participating and eight teams qualifying for this year's Global Finals. Our district was also selected to represent Canada at a showcase tournament in Beijing, China and finished second. I know that the students who have participated have found the experience valuable.

One student said, "School without DI is like sleep without dreams." Students who were resistant to DI three years ago are coming back after second year engineering and identifying it as the school activity that best prepared them for the realities of engineering. As educational leaders it is our responsibility to do what we know is right. In this case we have no excuse to not let what we know change what we do. ○

Gerald Fussell is the vice principal at École Mark R. Isfeld Secondary School, Comox Valley International Student Program.

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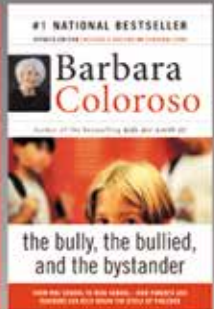
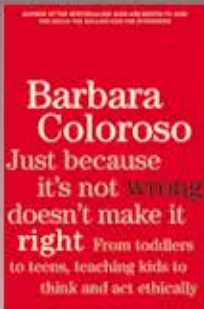


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Student Engagement through Successful Learner Traits

By Lucinda Wolters and Susan Bannister



A grade 3 student uses the SLF posters to assess how she completed her playground project.

The Comox Valley School District, serving students in Courtenay, British Columbia and the surrounding area, is a progressive district that encourages teachers to embrace and develop 21st century learning practices. Educators there have considered how to engage students in understanding learner competencies. These are significant and broad concepts that lead to questions such as: How can we engage young students in understanding what these competencies mean? How can we create meaningful learning experiences that allow for explicit teaching, reflection and demonstration of learner competencies? What learning benefits will students experience through a competency-based framework?

Successful Learner Traits

Over the last three years teacher Susan Bannister has had an increasing number of requests from teachers in the district to share her competency-based system called the Successful Learner Framework (SLF). Through workshops, Bannister helps educators understand

the dramatic benefits that students experience when teachers shift from a content-based perspective towards a competency-based focus.

According to Bannister's summary of the philosophy behind the competency-based framework, individuals do not experience success in life based on their content or procedural knowledge, rather success is a product of *how* an individual applies themselves. Traits such as persistence, creativity and compassion have a lot more to do with success than the ability to list historical dates, apply calculus or memorize curriculum content. Bannister emphasizes in her workshops that while shifting to a competency-based perspective can have a dramatic impact, it is not about tossing out the curriculum, but rather the intentional use of curriculum content as the context in which to teach the competencies.

The Traits and their Origins

Bannister describes the SLF as eight traits critical to student success and central to learning in all settings, at all ages. The traits are:

1. Confident
2. Compassionate
3. Strategic
4. Industrious
5. Thoughtful
6. Creative
7. Enthusiastic
8. Risk-taking

The SLF was created over a decade ago within the context of the British Columbia Primary Program: Foundation Document, (Ministry of Education, 1990). The list of eight traits was derived from two sources. "The first source was accessed by asking educators what traits, attributes or characteristics their students demonstrated that seemed to most significantly contribute to learning success. Independent of age or geographical area, teachers consistently identified the same or very similar characteristics which contributed to student success," (Bannister, S.A. Master's Thesis, 1992). The second source came from the Year 2000 mission statement called The Educated Citizen, (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990), which our current educational community upholds and uses.



This is a portion of a larger bulletin board displaying how grade 2 students are industrious.

Bannister emphasizes that it is not the SLF, nor competencies, that will have a deep impact; it is about *how* the framework is used that makes a lasting difference. Bannister helps educators understand the critical piece of coherency within practice as prerequisite to the effective use of the SLF. A coherent program makes clear links between what we say is important in society and the educational community, and what is taught, assessed, evaluated and reported on. Thus, students are involved in many aspects of the program. They develop a conceptual understanding of each trait then generate trait-based criteria, assessment and feedback practices that use the traits. They are given opportunities to self-assess and set goals. It's important that the traits be used as a vital part of reporting. The posters, lesson, and more on the SLF can be accessed at www.successful-learners.ca.

Professional Learning Communities

Interestingly, September 2013 marked the start of Professional Learning Community (PLC) time district-wide. Students are dismissed early one afternoon every two weeks to allow teachers, support staff and administrators to collaborate in PLC teams. Educators at Queneesh Elementary and Arden Elementary Schools chose the SLF as a whole school focus for one of their PLC topics.

After a full day workshop with Bannister, Queneesh teachers wholeheartedly set about shifting from a content-based focus to a competency-based focus using the SLF. Students were explicitly involved in developing a conceptual understanding of the traits, which were then used as assessment criteria. Further, the school is involved in twice monthly assemblies which feature a trait and have multi-aged groupings of children involved in a learning experience connected to the trait.

At Arden Elementary, the teachers noticed their students relied on extrinsic motivators and had a need for better self-regulation to focus on learning goals.

At the same time, Arden teachers examined the work of John Hattie (2008) and his meta-analysis of 138 influences on student learning. They discovered that students' ability to accurately self-report grades was the most highly ranked influence. Their ability to self-report grades was based on students' previous experiences. The teachers believed, then, that focusing on developing students' conceptual understanding of the successful learner traits would positively impact their perception of themselves as learners; they would shift from mastering content to understanding how to apply themselves effectively.

With this research, the SLF posters and a list of literature to provide examples of each learner trait, the PLC team engaged the students in developing a conceptual understanding of the traits. Teachers were explicitly building connections between what is important (the traits) and assessment. Many students have become adept at using the learner trait language through peer and self-assessments. Chris Lamont, a grade 6 teacher, states, "Our whole PLC concurs that the SLF has given many Arden students a new, intrinsic desire to succeed!"

Through the use of the SLF, educators in the Comox Valley School District are shifting their practice to provide students with opportunities to learn *how* to apply themselves and to recognize the benefits. Operationalizing students' understanding of learner competencies in context is well worth the effort for today's world. ○

Lucinda Wolters is the Vice Principal of Arden Elementary School.

Susan Bannister is a grade 1 teacher at Quenesb Elementary (www.successfulearners.ca).

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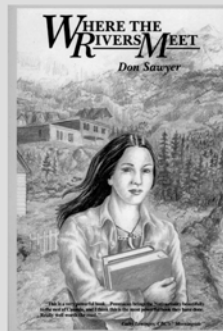
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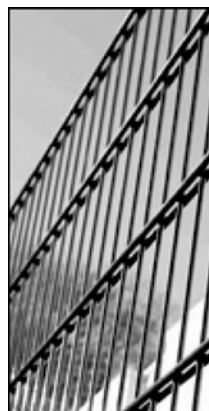
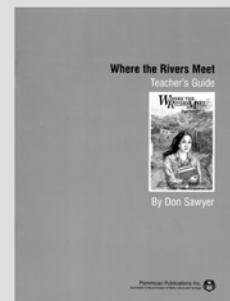
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By Carol Durnford and Duncan Buchanan

“Whooo Knew?” Student Engagement Starts with the Student

It's a new school year! A new class and a new group of students, each bringing their own set of unique interests, passions, backgrounds, strengths and challenges. And the annual question: where to begin? The year *should* begin with each individual in mind. However, for many teachers, September often begins not with the students, but with the curriculum at the forefront.

In order to wade through the depth of the programs of study, in all of the subject areas, teachers begin to plan without ever having met the students in their classes. They dig through the layers of learning outcomes and specific learner expectations and begin to map out the year's activities. The new school year typically begins with a plan to meet curricular needs and expectations.

Student engagement poses a challenge when the curriculum and not the students are at the heart of the year's planning. Yet, teachers are bound by the curriculum and need to be able to address the challenges of revealing it to the students. So where to begin?

In The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) publication *Science & Children* (May 2011, Volume 48, Number 9, p. 31-37), authors Ellen Schiller and Jacque Melin in their article *Whooo Knew – Assessment Strategies in Science Inquiry* describe one formative assessment method they have used as a planning tool to facilitate unit development in science classes. It begins with learning targets and is used as a personalized learning tool to help organize each student's learning activities.

Their use of learning targets focuses on formative assessment practices, which shifts their planning from content based activities,



matched with rote memorization-based content assessments, to assessments which examine students' conceptual understanding, as they engage in activities that involve scientific reasoning, inquiry skills, performances and products. The shift here is away from teacher centered, didactic teaching to student-centered and active learning.

Schiller and Melin begin their planning by identifying clear statements of intended learning from the program of study. These statements are created as “I can” statements in order to facilitate student understanding of the learning targets. In this way, there is clear intention of learning linked to the program of study, and students are informed by a clear roadmap of the concepts. Planning for assessment and activities can then easily occur after teachers meet their students and are able to determine possible ways to explore the learning targets based on student interests and current knowledge in the content area. In addition, students can be directly involved in self-reflection and actively engaged in learning strategies that relate to the learning targets.

As we began our new school year at Learning Services Innovation with Edmonton Catholic Schools, learning targets became a focus for our first webinar session in science inquiry. After reading the article by Schiller and Melin,

we decided to plan our first session in the fall around the concept of learning targets to assist teachers in their early planning work and to promote a focus on student engagement and hands-on, active learning.

The initial interest shown in the learning targets, throughout the school district, was very high. Teachers thought the use of learning targets would help bring the depth and detail of the program of study science units to a more manageable and clearly defined direction, not only for themselves but for their students' and parents' understanding.

The learning targets centered on the big ideas of the unit and teachers felt this would help them in their planning and in keeping their focus on the intended learning, while freeing them to be responsive to their students and to student engagement. Their only question was whether there were learning targets already developed for each unit in science across grades 1 through 6? Our answer was that these resources did not exist at the time.

As a result, with continued high interest shown by teachers and administrators, we decided to bring a group of educators together to form learning target writing teams for the two elementary divisions, Division 1, grades 1 to 3, and Division 2, grades 4 to 6. These

teachers came together over several days of intense review of the program of study, which also included a concerted effort to map out and generate a set of learning targets.

Interestingly, the teachers found the suggested methodology of dissecting and re-grouping concepts, in order to develop the learning targets, to be very valuable in and of itself. In addition, the variation that teachers' displayed in both their interpretation and production of these learning targets was apparent in the final product. The teachers did not all see the main ideas in the same way!

Although the intent with the sessions was to share the method with teachers so they could create learning targets as part of their planning, we found that the creation of these did take some time and deep understanding of the program of study in order to synthesize and group the specific learner expectations into broader categories.

In the end, we considered all of the contributors' input and wrote the learning target posters to maintain a focus on the big idea for the unit, as well as to be consistent in formatting the main learning outcomes as "I can" statements. As part of the final draft, beneath each learning outcome we made reference to the specific learner expectations (SLEs) from the program of studies. These SLEs became more of the background knowledge for the teacher, as well as competency indicators for the learning outcomes.

The posters gave a one page road map that provided a method of grouping for intended learning outcomes that moved from a list of 12 to 16 specific learner expectations, to three to four learner outcomes. In addition, the posters were given to our graphics department to add the visual element to support each of the outcomes and the central idea for each unit. The pictorial references for each outcome proved to be very valuable for students and parents in particular.

Encompassing all six grade levels, and all five topics within each grade, the learning target posters were developed to support teacher planning for engagement and formative assessment, as well as to provide a learning roadmap for students and parents.

With the big ideas central to planning, student engagement *can* start with the student. Whoohoo knew? ○

Carol Durnford (B.Ed, M.Ed) is vice-principal at Monsignor Fee Otterson Elementary/Junior High School in the Edmonton Catholic

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Working Collaboratively to Meet Intersecting Needs

By Joseph Geiser, Shirley Kendrick and Max Vecchiarino

The Ontario Ministry of Education has developed three core priorities that are improving student achievement and well-being, reducing gaps in achievement and improving confidence in publically-funded education. In Dufferin-Peel Catholic, these priorities are lived through processes and monitoring/evaluation cycles that honour the voice of students with special needs. A team approach to both planning and implementation of all aspects of district support is essential.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic serves approximately 85,000 students in almost 150 schools. About 10 per cent have special needs. At the district level, the intersection of the Special Education & Support Services and Employee Relations departments has an impact on how effectively programs and services are provided. This intersection is illustrated through a fictitious case study which showcases collective efforts striving to meet the needs of all exceptional students, each one called by name.

Community is not without conflict Dr. Lucy Miller, April 22, 2010

Andrew is a 16-year-old student with special education needs in a large secondary school. He is identified as having multiple exceptionality, intellectual and behavioural. As a student formally identified as having such needs, he is supported through a wide variety of legislative intersections. Physically strong, Andrew stands over six feet tall, has a gift for attention to detail and loves to build structures on which he can intensely focus. Staff continue to inquire how best to engage him in ways that might allow him to enjoy other school activities, as he is often observed to be sad or sullen unless involved in building structures. Andrew has recently had increasing difficulty

expressing needs and his behaviour has become unsettled. During one particular week, Andrew injured the classroom teacher and educational assistant (EA). Both have sought medical intervention and one remains off work. Other EAs in the classroom have initiated a formal work refusal stating they are frightened of the student's behaviour. His parents strongly disagree with the school's approach with their son.

The student is discussed at a school team meeting. Members of the team, including school administration, teachers and support services staff are present and note concerns. All members of the team wonder how best to engage Andrew's parents. The principal has contacted the Family of Schools Superintendent and the Special Education & Support Services Department for input.

Given that in formal work refusals, staff may or may not choose to involve their individual association/union representatives, the EA Association has contacted the Employee Relations Department. While Ontario's *Education Act* governs education, the association representing EAs has initiated the work refusal based on a labour concern, making reference to Health and Safety legislation. Working to

support Andrew, the two central departments acknowledge a need for all involved to articulate their perspectives and build on shared expertise and hope-filled practice.

There is a need to recognize all intersections. In recognition of intersecting legislation, the school team meets to work through numerous issues simultaneously: safety, parent engagement, the Individual Education Plan, communication plan, safety plan, support services recommendations and/or the availability of outside agency supports. The entire team's expertise will be required in providing support and possible solutions will stem from each member of the team working in concert. In a parallel process at the district level, successful practices will include the capacity to support interactions between departments, the overall support of the situation at the local level and through key stakeholders, including parents and association leads.

Corporate and instructional branches of the school district work best when, collaboratively, they are able to ensure that working conditions support the learning environment, enhancing the conditions for individual student success. Building supportive relationships within and across departments relies on trust, empathy and hope. Partners work to support the need for co-planning to maximize the strengths of all stakeholders. No one individual/department can be solely responsible for providing supports for students with diverse learning needs.

The case study calls for the recognition that cross-departmental work eschews isolation and, therefore, is a key intersection. Interdepartmental relationships in this case are powerful reminders that intradepartmental and/or local priorities may not be shared priorities; to ensure coherence, they must become interdepartmental and/or system priorities. Andrew's case was resolved through ongoing conversations at all levels. With the student at the center, all



remained mindful that empathy, forgiveness and reconciliation are required in shared decision making.

In the long run, formal process integration, annual updates on administrative practices, ongoing meetings/interactions and aligned professional development anchor formal structures, identifying priorities and next steps. Sometimes these can be generalized to multiple students; other times case by case examples.

The value-added opportunity in layered intersectionality is provided by the informal conversations between members of the departments. This includes the supervisory officers' team which serve to contextualize more formal processes and meetings, enriching situations in a broad context. Early awareness of student, staff and family needs and considerations of their impact on working conditions at the local and district levels enable co-departmental teamwork to promote coordinated commitment to support all.

In support of student achievement and well-being, department teams strive to maintain high standards in protecting privacy and other legislated rights of children and families, mindful of formal collective

agreements and good faith practices. Both departments are respectful of nuances in dealing with the multiple dimensions of social and human (i.e. imperfect) relationships. Formal and informal opportunities at the district level to further the concepts of empathy, forgiveness and reconciliation in decision making are highlighted by Andrew's story. As said by Shawn Murphy, there must be a commitment to "... talk less—listen more, as we cannot talk and deeply listen at the same time," (lead-changegroup.com/author/shawmu). Andrew's case calls all stakeholders together to discuss challenges openly and to collaborate in finding solutions and resolutions.

The authors believe in the importance of the work done day to day. The necessity of paying attention to complex situations goes beyond required to become desirable and, hopefully, inevitable. Openness to complexity leads to a richer, fuller set of solutions and possibilities. In support of complex students such as Andrew, teamwork is essential to support all for "If we find no peace [no solution], it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." (Blessed Teresa of Calcutta). ○

Joseph Geiser is the superintendent of strategic planning and policy, special projects (formerly superintendent of employee relations).

Shirley Kendrick is the superintendent of special education and support services.

Max Vecchiarino is the superintendent of schools (formerly assistant superintendent of special education and support services).

Intersectionality

The definition of intersectionality varies by research context, but a consistent thread across definitions is that social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another. It is also widely agreed that intersections create both oppression and opportunity.... In other words, being on the advantaged side offers more than avoidance of disadvantage or oppression by actually opening up access to rewards and opportunities unavailable to other intersections.

Shields, Stephanie, A. (2008). Gender: An intersectionality perspective. Sex Roles, 59: 301-311.

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Focused Intervention Plan Yielding Strong Results for Applied Level Students

By Dr. Jennifer Leclerc and Shelly Roy

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, like many, face the challenge of how to design and create conditions which foster responsive learning environments that actively engage students in applied level programs. Our focused intentional adolescent literacy initiative connects student and teacher voices to student learning. This secondary Focused Intervention Planning Project (FIPP) pursues the common core curriculum of literacy and fosters a responsive learning environment that engages students and teachers in active learning partnerships.

Over the last three years a secondary FIPP pilot project began in two diverse secondary schools in different regions. Using data to inform our decisions, the two schools were chosen based on lower Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) scores and their willingness to meet the conditions for the FIPP.

In the FIPP model, a co-teacher who is the literacy expert and an existing member of staff, co-plans, teaches, assesses and debriefs within a subject specific content area for two full periods of grade 10 applied or open courses each day. This structure is designed by the school principal to support teamwork and shared responsibility of educators, teachers and board consultants.

The goals of FIPP are:

- To increase student pass rates on the OSSLT; and
- To enhance subject teachers' and co-teacher's capacity to integrate focused instructional literacy strategies in all of their grades 9 and 10 applied, locally developed and open courses.

The key literacy skills focused on are responsive to the analysis of school data. Principals have indicated the necessity of consultant support for the success of FIPP. The consultant creates a consistent and aligned central process for schools. Full day professional development sessions are offered throughout the year around the targeted content and on strategies related to coaching. On-going, job embedded professional learning is provided on a weekly basis responsive to school team needs.

What are the conditions necessary to make this project successful?

- The co-teacher and content area teacher plan, assess and debrief together every day with regular consultant support.
- At least 45 minutes in each 75 minute period for individual, pair or group work so the co-teacher and teacher can implement on-going descriptive feedback based on daily observations of each student's thinking.
- A classroom environment which allows for flexible groups, on-task talk, explicit instruction, and displayed anchor charts and student work.
- Backwards design of units based on the Ontario Curriculum, including pre and post tests to determine marker students and their growth.



Assessment for learning for timely and responsive programming.



Small guided groups with targeted teaching strategies support learners in the applied level class.

- A positive, collaborative relationship between teacher and co-teacher wherein both people take a learning stance.

Observations

Observations School #1

- Successful OSSLT results for grade 10 applied students (FTE) for the last three years:

| YEAR | SCHOOL RESULTS | BOARD | PROVINCE |
|------|--------------------|-------|----------|
| 2013 | 72% FIPP continues | 56% | 53% |
| 2012 | 63% FIPP begins | 59% | 55% |
| 2011 | 57% NO FIPP | 64% | 60% |

It was indicated at the school that even those students who were unsuccessful on the OSSLT are becoming stronger in their literacy skills as there are less unsuccessful students with a final score of less than 275.

Observations School #2

- Successful OSSLT results for grade 10 applied students (FTE) for the last three years:

| YEAR | SCHOOL RESULTS | BOARD | PROVINCE |
|------|--------------------|-------|----------|
| 2013 | 76% FIPP continues | 56% | 53% |
| 2012 | 35% FIPP begins | 59% | 55% |
| 2011 | 40% NO FIPP | 64% | 60% |

Observations School #3

- FIPP began in this school in February 2012 in two grade 10 applied English classes during the first half of the second semester.

| ENG 2P1 | FIPP | NON-FIPP |
|---------------------|------|----------|
| Passed Course | 96% | 82% |
| 15 or more absences | 29% | 41% |

The FIPP classes have a higher pass rate (14 per cent higher) and lower absenteeism (12 per cent less) than the non-FIPP classes.

What is making the difference?

1. The de-privatization of teacher practice to include coaching, mentoring and collaborating resulted in teacher's practice becoming more precise. A grade 10 applied English teacher began using pre-tests regularly, "To indicate who needed the guided practice the most, so we could group students according to their learning needs." She understands that, "What you want the students to know, do and understand should be reflected in the learning goals you have outlined in student-friendly language at the beginning of an instructional period."
2. The power of co-teaching resulted in increased student engagement and learning skills. "My FIPP students were consistently engaged, on-task and benefitted from the two teachers' styles. There was greater accountability for work completion and therefore, a higher credit attainment rate. Students didn't fall through the cracks," said one teacher.
3. Teacher's observation and reflective skills improved. "Our reflections and debriefing after each lesson became natural and intentional. We would look carefully at our observations and make a plan for our next steps.
4. Students' confidence and meta-cognition improved. One student said, "My follow up on the OSSLT with FIPP classes yielded very positive

responses from students about their perceived success on the test. In addition, students could clearly pinpoint areas of difficulty and reflect on what parts of a task caused a problem and students were then able to self-assess."

5. Students feel cared for and experience success in non-FIPP courses. As one teacher said, "Students feel supported because of FIPP; they feel that they are receiving lots of support in the content area. Also, other teachers notice a difference in the way students respond to school, in terms of engagement, increased attendance and achievement in other subject areas."
6. There was increased student success. Students are "gaining necessary skills to be successful in other classes; their credit accumulation has increased and they have an improved self-esteem due to improved performance."

The implementation of a focused intervention strategy and the precise framework of co-teaching, co-planning intensified the teachers/consultant foci to improve their literacy skills and develop a learning stance. The process deepened the productive culture of teacher collaboration. (Ontario Leadership Strategy, *Closing the Achievement Gap*, 2012, p.43). This coupled with the deliberate deployment of both human and financial resources aligned with the principals' focused leadership on tracking and monitoring continues to support student achievement.

Moving forward the next level of work has begun with a focus on grade 9 applied math classes with similar successes being evidenced in the early stages as it unfolds for the 2013-2014 school year. ○

Dr. Jennifer Leclerc is the superintendent of teaching and learning. Shelly Roy is the superintendent of schools and student achievement.

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System Change, Teacher Transformation and Increased Student Engagement

By Janet Martell and Leanne Peters

Ashern Central School Learning Centre replaced the seldom read books with comfortable, flexible seating and space to work. It is a place students can find learning support teachers and can access mobile technology. There are still books, but they have been updated to reflect current students' interests.

Lundar High School's antiquated library has been turned into a vibrant, student-friendly support centre. Students can work with peers or a teacher, or by themselves. They can chat with the liaison worker or schedule meetings with a guidance teacher.

These projects were a part of Reimagine Lakeshore, a process to create system-wide change. It is teacher transformation to improve student learning outcomes and student engagement.

In December 2012, superintendent and CEO Janet Martell told 55 teachers who came out to a meeting that we were no longer meeting the needs of the students in classrooms. Teachers were working hard, we wanted the best for the students, but we just weren't having success. We embarked on the process of Reimagine Lakeshore.

Led by Dr. Sheila Giesbrecht from Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, teachers looked at their school and catchment area data, including graduation rates and provincial assessment data. Teachers examined aspects of their own school cultures and created a list of things that were unique to their school. Using this data, schools created a "problem statement" to define what they wanted to improve at their school.

Teachers shared with their colleagues, examined their teaching practices and collectively determined what they wanted to reimagine in their school. Following the creation of a "problem statement," schools moved to "ideate." They generated ideas to address problems. Teachers formed 14 learning cohorts based on their interests, including integration of technology, nature-based education, and parental involvement. Teachers gathered to conduct research, share



Grade 3 and 4 students in Lundar Early Years School doing yoga with the iPads as part of an integrated unit of study on India.

ideas and look at ways to enhance their own practices. Teachers realized they needed greater access and exposure to new ideas and practices. Some teachers participated in learning tours to other schools then returned with reports on their learning and ways to integrate new learning into Lakeshore's classrooms.

In September 2013, some teachers began to experiment with new ways of engaging students. The experiments focused in three main areas: integration of technology, instructional practices, and facilities. Lakeshore School Division became a part of Brandon University's VOICE Project. Funded by a SSHRC-CURA grant, the project provided some funding to support Lakeshore's teachers. The division received a set of iPads shared between four schools in ten week blocks. One grade 3 and 4 class used their iPads to travel to India, learning about yoga, the Taj Mahal and Bengal tigers. They learned about driving in India, then created and presented journals about what they learned. The grant also provided some funds so teachers could reimagine facilities, technology and instructional practices.

Other experiments are happening, such as

project-based learning and mapping curriculums over two years using questions for student inquiry. One of the most powerful moments in the process came when trustee Jim Cooper told teachers, "The board is behind you. We want you to try some things in your classrooms, if those don't work, try some other things; it's OK to fail." Teachers embraced the words of Simon Breakspear who said schools should be deeply personalized and learning should be relevant and authentically meaningful. Teachers took this message to heart. They worked hard to become even better teachers with more strategies to improve learning and engage students.

Moving forward, we will continue to encourage and invite more teachers to experiment, examine their practice and refine their learning. Teachers in the division have embraced the challenge; they have refined their teaching and learning practices, and they have experienced success. The division is well on the journey to creating a culture of risk-taking and collaboration in order to enhance student learning and engagement. In the words of Fullan (2006), "Collaborative cultures, ones that focus on the capacity for building continuous improvement, are meant to be a new way of working and learning"(6).

For more information on Reimagine Lakeshore, please visit www.reimagine.lakeshore.com. ○

Janet Martell is the superintendent and CEO of the Lakeshore School Division.

Leanne Peters is the assistant superintendent of the Lakeshore School Division.

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Special Needs Students Learn Real-Life Skills

By Patti L. Moore and Julie Slattery



Students delivered a meal that they prepared for Jeffery Hale Community Partners, along with Julie Slattery who is on the far left in red.

All parents wonder and worry about what their children are going to do when they grow up. But the parents of children with significant learning difficulties stay awake at night. Will their child be able to live independently? Have a social life? Live away from home? Hold down a job? Eat well and regularly? Get ongoing, regular support?

The Work-Oriented Training Path (WOTP) is designed for students aged 15 to 21 who have significant learning difficulties and/or learning delays. Designed as either a one-year or three-year program, students continue their general education as far as possible while getting practical training for the job market.

Educator Julie Slattery has worked with special needs students for 21 years. The students are on her mind from her early arrival in school each day to Friday night bowling activities she organizes, to the three monthly Saturday afternoon student leadership and mentoring programs.

The idea for the Café Inn first emerged in 2009 as a win-win partnership with psycho-education students at the Université de Québec à Trois-Rivières campus. The university students wanted a food service. Quebec High School (QHS) WOTP students needed to complete workplace training requirements. The WOTP students now run the cafe. They are responsible for ordering supplies, planning and preparing meals, serving customers and operating the cash. The university students eat well and get first-hand experience with a clientele they will be working with after graduation.

Following the launch of the Café Inn in 2010, Slattery met with the parents of her

students to ask them what skills they wanted their children to learn. Parents didn't want their children to simply pass the program, they wanted them to have success after graduation and live as independent a life as possible.

Slattery acknowledges that ensuring a transition from school to adult life is a priority and constant challenge. Program volunteers come and go. Representatives of the various community groups change. Nonetheless, the constant is a school team that has committed to making this work long term. QHS expects the students in this program to:

- Accept responsibility for arranging and using public transportation;
- Accept responsibility for their learning;
- Prepare, research and be fully involved in workplace training;
- Be responsible for their social life;
- Take care of their health and be aware of services available to them;
- Actively take part in the transition to adult life;
- Know their rights; and
- Actively take part in organizing living arrangements.

The school has a transition plan to help them meet these objectives. If students have significant limitations, the school ensures they have support after the age of 21 to continue working on these areas.

After three active years, the Café Inn program continues to thrive and is the reference model for the development of the QHS SNACS* Entrepreneur program (*Special Needs Activities and Community Services). It includes partners from English and French speaking communities, various ministries, the health sector, the education sector and local community volunteers. When the SNACS

program is fully operational, students will be able to provide catering services, and prepare and sell frozen and fresh meals, while learning skills that will empower them to live more independently.

The benefits are numerous. Students with limited mobility who could not travel to work in the Café Inn will be able to work for the SNACS program which is right in the school. Students are learning about the importance of good nutrition while acquiring valuable workplace skills.

The SNACS program is fully integrated into the school community. "When our SNACS program students are in the kitchen, the smells waft through the entire school," smiles Slattery. "The entire building smells like home." Former students drop in to say hello and stay to encourage those in the program to stick with it. According to Slattery, it's all about understanding that there is no such thing as a norm that every child must fit into. "It's about teaching our students the notions that are required in order to become an adult. What specific things will they need to be able to do to live an independent life? It's about focussing on strengths and allowing students to experience success, one achievement at a time."

When asked what comes next, Slattery didn't hesitate. "The long-term goal is to ensure that these students can live independently; that they will be able to make their own living arrangements; that they will be able to socialize. We want them to have a transition plan for real life. We want them to find meaningful, long-term employment. We are also focussing on early intervention, to ensure that our youngest students with significant learning difficulties will have well-prepared, well-structured and well-supported footsteps in which to follow."

When other students left for a sliding day at a nearby winter resort, the WOTP students opted to go to their practicum rather than to participate in the winter outing. They said the former was way more fun. ○

Patti L. Moore is the Quebec School Board secretary general.

Julie Slattery is the Quebec High School work-oriented training path special care councillor.



SPECIAL FOCUS



Social Justice in Edmonton Catholic Schools

By John Tidswell

Students in Edmonton Catholic Schools have been involved in social justice activities since our inception 125 years ago. Social justice is a way for Catholics to practice their faith and is therefore central to Catholic education. In 2012 we entered into a partnership agreement with Free the Children. This partnership has expanded opportunities to engage in social action and has provided an outstanding opportunity to celebrate the work being done in our schools.

Free the Children is a Canadian charity that was started by a 12 year old Toronto student in 1995. This organization has morphed into one of the largest non-governmental organizations (NGO) in the world and the story of its inception continues to inspire Edmonton Catholic students who understand they can make a difference in their world today. By partnering with Free the Children, Edmonton Catholic teachers and students have access to a tremendous amount of resources, tools, strategies, workshops and ideas created by the NGO to help make social justice projects more effective. This partnership allows some of our students to attend We Day.

Constance Foure (2009) identified five stages at which social actions occur. Her framework provides a hierarchy of involvement in social justice going from direct giving, to direct action, to empowering others with new skills, to reflecting on social actions and finally to advocating for systemic change. Edmonton Catholic teachers work with students to explore the complexity of social issues and to examine ways they can make the biggest impact. Students are encouraged to examine strategies that empower them to incorporate other stages into their social justice work. This consideration of various approaches helps make social justice activities richer and more meaningful for both our teachers and students.

At Edmonton Catholic Schools, we believe in permeating the Catholic faith



Junior High students from St. Elizabeth Seton prepare for We Day.

in everything we do. Because of this, social justice projects are not the exclusive domain of religion classes. Teachers look for opportunities to meet curriculum outcomes from a variety of courses when students are engaged in social action. For example, many activities require communicating through letters, emails and multimedia products that all help develop language arts skills.

By assigning students to interact with agencies, NGOs, and government departments, they develop important communication and interpersonal skills. Collections and selling of products for charity require inventory control and money management skills that help students learn math. Students have opportunities to integrate technology skills when communicating and promoting their ideas. Social studies helps students understand the inequalities that exist in the world and often inspires them to take action. In science, teachers help students appreciate their roles as stewards of the Earth and appreciate real world challenges facing individuals who are lacking resources, such as water. Teachers also look for opportunities to give students an authentic voice in social justice work so that the action truly comes from the students.

We Day is an annual event organized by Free the Children. It empowers and motivates youth to take action on local and global issues. The event features speeches and performances from artists, musicians, social activists and leaders. To earn entry, schools must pledge to take specific social actions and report on the work they have done. Schools cannot buy their way into the event.

The day itself is highly entertaining and motivational. It allows students to continue to learn about issues in the world while celebrating all the good work already done. We Day empowers students to see themselves as agents of change. They hear a multitude of case studies where young people have made a difference in their world. Our students have returned from We Day the last two years motivated to make a positive contribution to the world they live in. Many of our staff and students really look forward to We Day and see it as an important element of social justice at Edmonton Catholic Schools. ○

John Tidswell is a social studies consultant for Edmonton Catholic Schools. He is interested in politics, economics and history, and is passionate about the arts.



Student Engagement: It Takes a Whole Village

By Simone Gessler

Opening ceremonies for Positive Behaviour Support Day 2013, Farmin' Lupi Style.



Weledeh Middle School students celebrate being inducted into the "Think Pink" Gang.

I am inclined to believe it was a teacher who created the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." After all, as educators we know that it takes a whole school to engage our students and have them take pride in being an active member of their school community.

Despite the fact that teachers would love to believe students attend school simply for the love of learning, we understand that our buildings are more than just a place of books, lessons and learning. Providing opportunities for exploration, discovery, excitement, social expression and community celebration is essential for creating an environment that invites all students to be actively engaged participants. The question is, how do we provide those extended opportunities that engage, encourage and motivate students, in addition to daily instructional planning, and still have a life of our own?

Realizing how crucial student engagement and school attachment is to achievement and learning, and also recognizing that staff wellness and balance is essential to a positive school culture, administration at Weledeh Catholic School looked to design a way to address both through a shared leadership and school teams approach. The shared leadership model of school teams has allowed student programs, activities and events to be planned and organized by six collaborative teams, dividing the responsibility of relationship

building and student engagement among all staff. The six teams focus on areas of achievement, positive culture and school attachment in support of student engagement. Is it possible that the English proverb, "Many hands make light work," was also coined by a teacher?

Aside from shared workload, the school teams format has several additional benefits. We have witnessed significant growth and success in areas of school attachment and student engagement, both of which are a direct result of increased staff involvement in the school culture. Staff is more invested when they are making decisions and organizing events as a team. The sense of accomplishment after implementing a successful school event is contagious, and recognizing the difference they have made for our students energizes team members. Staff takes ownership of their team's role in the school, and is dedicated and passionate about what they are planning. This is especially true of team leaders.

Building leadership capacity has been an integral part of the school teams model. Staff members with a passion in certain areas of student programming become team leaders. Consequently, people are excited at the prospect of taking on a leadership role and the few who are intimidated by the idea still accept the challenge despite being outside their comfort zone. Team leaders inevitably demonstrate growth as a result of building confidence and acquiring a

better understanding of the dynamics of working with and managing a team.

Integral to the success of the school teams model was the provision of planning time once per month in the early dismissal rotation. Timetabling school teams into the workday shifted the responsibility of student engagement from a few staff members to the staff as a whole. Providing time to meet and plan establishes the importance of school teams and their role in enhancing student engagement at Weledeh. As a result, staff feel less "done to" and have a greater sense of camaraderie and team spirit in working with their colleagues to plan major school events. Weledeh's school teams model has created a more positive attitude among staff and subsequently has increased staff willingness to provide extended opportunities for students.

There is never a time when a school is not busy. As educators and as schools, we strive to provide our students with opportunities that enlighten them, offer them a platform to shine and to share, to be excited about being members of a community and to celebrate that membership. We need them to be engaged, and therefore sharing the responsibility of creating a thriving, inspiring and engaging place of learning is a commitment best met by a village. . . ○

Simone Gessler is Principal of Weledeh Catholic School, a kindergarten to grade 8 school with 400 students, in Yellowknife, NT.



SPECIAL FOCUS



Co-construction as the Driver for Student Success

By Joanna Crapsi

Educators are well aware that there are many variables that impact student engagement. Among the influences are the home, the school and the curriculum (Hattie, 2009). Any one or all of these variables can impact whether a student simply shows up physically or whether they are psychologically engaged in their learning. The challenge becomes how districts harness these variables to positively impact student engagement to improve student achievement. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board endeavoured to do just that through an innovative program called the After School Scholars Community Program.

An essential element to the program's success is the co-construction of all aspects of the program. From the central coordinating team to the school team, right to the student level, the program is structured to be highly responsive to school, student and family needs. The program is driven by the belief that schools know their students best and should be supported in targeting student achievement at the school level. The program is centrally coordinated. However, most of the decisions are site based, such as who to hire as instructors, selection of students and how the 30 hours of instructional time will be allocated based on what works best in their community. This collaboration and shared leadership ensures that the programs are targeted, strategic and responsive to schools' needs.

This philosophy carries over to the student level. There is no binder of pre-made lessons. Instructors are trained and respected as thinking practitioners. Training includes an analysis of student data and opportunities to network with other instructors. Resources are carried over from the classroom level providing students with a seamless intervention from the school day.

Parents of students in the After School Scholars Program are invited to participate using personal communication through face-to-face contact or phone calls. They

join their children in a family meal, where instructors build relationships with the parents and model educational conversations with their children, discussing new learning. Parents generate their own topics for learning and the administrator, as facilitator, reaches out to community connections to engage with the parent group.

This kind of co-construction removes the ever present bias among middle-class educators. For example, while generating topics under the theme of safety, the unanimous choice for discussion was fire safety. While this was at first surprising to the administrator facilitating the group, upon reflection it became clear that while the home of the average teacher or administrator may not be a fire hazard, many of the families in this community were living in rentals that were poorly maintained and contained many fire hazards. In fact, that year three families had been displaced as a result of fires in their homes.

Over a short time, as the groups emerge, topics for learning extend into more academic areas. Instruction around math, aboriginal education and literacy has changed since parents were in school. They expressed the desire to learn how to engage with their children in these topics and eventually the desire to learn about getting their own high school diplomas, if they hadn't yet graduated. As a result of their inquiry, over 25 parents at Prince of Wales School registered and are working toward their own high school diplomas, right in their child's school. Some participated in the school's graduation ceremony, walking across the stage with other students and making a speech, receiving a standing ovation.

Student achievement data has consistently demonstrated the impact of this program on improving student achievement on provincial testing. The program has spread from one school to 12. It has included the sharing of our learning outside of our system as similar philosophies



After School Scholars provides a seamless transition from the child's school day.



A small group intervention provides for strategic, targeted support for students.

to student and parental engagement are explored by neighbouring boards across the province. The program continues to evolve and be shaped through its co-construction with schools, instructors, parents and students. Indeed, we do believe that it is this responsive approach to which its success in meaningfully engaging students and families is owed. So where will it go next? Not sure. We need to ask our school, our students, and our parents. ○

Joanna Crapsi is the principal of Roxborough Park School, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

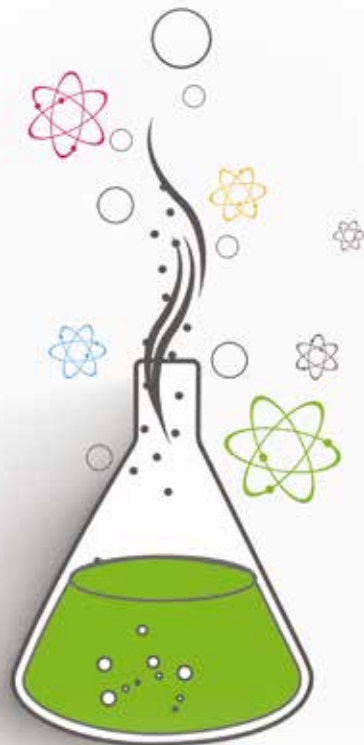
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Adopting Promising Practices: Student Engagement work at Evergreen Elementary

By Scott Kupsch



Early on the leadership path, I became very interested in some catch phrases such as the Definition of Insanity, Flow (psychological investment in learning), the Mead quote above, and “Never Work Harder than your Students” (Jackson, 2009).

We had been trying to get traction on division initiatives, particularly with inquiry based learning, but hadn’t seen a large enough transfer to the learner. I don’t know if we have the formula to get from the “macro—research” of professional development (PD) to the “micro—classroom learning”, but I do believe much of the research and PD we do (and I mean powerful, well done examples) never reaches the intended audience (the teacher) thus never influencing the client (our students). Moreover, when teachers do get the opportunity to attend conferences, or even when they self-motivate and delve into current research on their own, the *time* it takes to immerse enough into the newly acquired data is often

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead

unavailable. This is largely due to existing practices already demanding their full capacity of resources.

Here are the three steps our colleagues collaboratively took, including division office employees, school leadership and, most importantly, teachers.

1. Get Allies

I wanted a grade level where I could track the students for multiple years. Fortunately, we had grade 4 teachers who were willing to enter into a risk taking cooperative. Through this smaller, focussed team, we leapt into the pilot realizing we couldn’t possibly have a clear, comprehensive vision of what it would look like.

2. Gain competence

Our teachers self-directed to work collaboratively with an expert. School leadership supports with time away from the classroom to create opportunity for the necessary PD. Micro-managing will not help (does it ever?). Accessing an expert from the Galileo Network out of the University of Calgary, the teachers planned to execute an authentic project based unit. This has evolved into the engaging environment we have today.

3. Move forward slowly but steadily

Plan for time to reflect, revise and repeat. Administration again supports, like with step two. We have been able to repeat this process in grades 5 and 6. Naturally things look different from grade to grade, but the core sentiments respecting the learner in a student-centered classroom and the principles identified in *What did you do in school today* (Friesen, 2009), are always present.

What we learned a little bit the hard way is to include parents in the pre-work process. The information must be concise and palatable. By the end of the first year, the

questions changed from, “What about spelling tests?” to “How do we get this in every grade?” These are the continuum extremes of course, but it would have been nice to have the parents more understanding of the opportunity we were creating for their children from the get go.

The inquiry based classroom aligns very nicely with the new Ministerial Order for Education in the province of Alberta. It is an empowering feeling to know we are on the leading path. This story is one example of the work we do around student engagement. There are many others that I wish I could acknowledge here. I have to tell you, the teacher’s stories are terrific and, really, better than this one as they are right at the learning level.

My favorite part is that it has no conclusion. This is, in fact, the point. We are supposed to be on a never ending evolving journey. ○

Scott Kupsch has been a principal for four years at Evergreen Elementary in Drayton Valley, Alta. He has a Music Diploma from Red Deer College, a Bachelor’s Degree in Education from the University of Alberta, and a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.

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SPECIAL FOCUS



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19th Annual Values and Leadership Conference

The conference is being hosted by Nipissing University at Deerhurst Resort in the Muskoka Lakes District, Ontario. Topics that will be explored include:

- The power of emerging media and technology;
- The development of participatory cultures;
- The juxtaposition of local and global perspectives;
- The centrality of relationships and communities; and
- The pressures from political interests.

Find more information at <http://cslee19.nipissingu.ca>.

Sept. 18-20, 2014

Physical Education Special Interest Council Conference

For more information on the conference, being held in St. John's, Newfoundland, go to www.phecanada.ca/events/calendar-events/pesic-physical-education-special-interest-council-conference.

Oct. 16-17

Ophea Healthy Schools Conference

Elementary and secondary teachers, administrators, health and physical education consultants, public health professionals and community leaders will gather in Toronto to learn about support children and youth in having healthy and active lives. Find more information at www.phecanada.ca/events/calendar-events/ophea-healthy-schools-conference.

Nov. 5-7, 2014

CASS Fall Conference

CASS members are meeting at the Sheraton Cavalier in Calgary for a board meeting. Find more details at http://www.cass.ab.ca/cass_fall_conference.

Nov. 13-14, 2014

Education for ACTION: Mental Health & Wellness

The event takes place at Canad Inns Polo Park in Winnipeg.



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The annual Ontario Public Supervisory Officers Association (OPSOA) held its annual conference from April 24 to 25, 2014. The theme of the conference, “Engaging Minds & Hearts,” supported the on-going work of the membership in implementing the Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Speakers included:

- Dr. Susan Dion & Tanya Senk (“DEBWEWIN: An Indigenous Digital Storytelling Project”);
- Shakil Choudhury (“The Unconscious Mind, Bias and Blind-Spots”);
- Julian Falconer (“Institutional Resistance to Change: Concrete Walls and Headaches”);

- The Honourable Liz Sandals, Minister of Education; and
- Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission (“Creating Equitable, Inclusive and Barrier-Free Environments”).

Conference participants also had the option of attending additional presentations, including “Leadership in a Reconciliation Paradigm” (Dr. Bob Watts), “Understanding the OCDSB’s Diverse Talent Capacity” (Jacqueline Lawrence, Ottawa-Carleton DSB), and “Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentoring Program” (Peel District School Board).

As a pre-conference component, OPSOA and the Ontario Principals’ Council

(OPC) sponsored the 11th annual one-day symposium. This year’s speakers were Dr. Carol Campbell and Dr. Michael Fullan. Their presentation addressed “Maximizing Impact: School and System Leadership Collaboration.”

Thursday evening’s “President’s Dinner” provided an opportunity for OPSOA members to celebrate the membership in a variety of ways. Fifty-five new members were welcomed and the retirement of 22 members was celebrated. OPSOA recognized the exemplary leadership of two members with its annual leadership awards given to Catherine Siemieniuk (Director of Education with Lakehead District School Board) and Peter Gamwell



School Division one of Top 65 Employers in Alberta

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) was named one of Alberta's top 65 employers for 2014 by Mediagroup. They were recognized for their professional development initiatives and health care benefits, as well as positive and engaged workplace culture.

EIPS provides their staff with formal mentoring, apprenticeship opportunities and subsidies for courses taken outside the schools.

Mediagroup also mentioned the division's maternity and parental leave. New parents of biological or adopted children get up to 37 weeks leave with 100 per cent of their salary, and then can take an optional extended leave unpaid. When parents return to work, they enjoy onsite daycares and flexible work schedules. It is also recognized as a positive and engaged work culture.

The division is one of the largest in Alberta, with around 1,000 full-time employees and over 500 part-time staff members between 42 schools.

Hundreds of employers applied to be on Mediagroup's list. After an extensive review of operations and human resources practices, EIPS made the cut.

(Superintendent with Ottawa DSB). OPSOA's annual general meeting saw the election of a president for 2014-2015, Joy Badder. She is the Superintendent of Education - Leading and Learning, Lambton Kent District School Board.

I would like to recognize the excellent leadership of the 2013-2014 OPSOA Board of Directors, especially that of President Norah Marsh and Executive Director Kathy Soule. Thank you to the entire board, for your leadership and time devoted to OPSOA.

Many of our OPSOA members are planning to attend the CASSA conference in July. We hope to see you there!

Helping Aboriginal Youth Succeed

The Province of Ontario and the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative are partnering to help aboriginal students develop business and entrepreneurial skills. The Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program, for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, was developed in 2007 and is already in place in seven provinces and one territory.

The program teaches the students business mathematics, financial literacy, accounting, marketing, information/communications technology and social responsibility. Aboriginal business owners are brought in to teach students how to run their own business, including coming up with an idea for a product or service based business and writing a business plan. Some of the students will even get funding to start the business they propose.

The project will start this September, with grade 11 and 12 students from Fort Frances, Kenora, London, Sioux Lookout, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Toronto and Wallaceburg. All participating students will receive two credits for the program. The government has invested \$1.35 million to run the program for three years.

WeDay events have been announced for Canadian cities in fall 2014.

- Toronto – October 2
- Vancouver – October 22
- Manitoba – October 29
- Alberta – November 3
- Saskatchewan – November 7
- Waterloo region – November 20
- Atlantic Canada – November 28

Small Northern School Board's Literacy Initiative Wins Gold

Though students in the South Slave division were achieving better results in math and reading than any of the other divisions in the North West Territories, the South Slave Divisional Education Council decided to work with parents, elders and community groups to raise their children's reading level to the national norm.

Leadership for Literacy was created for the eight schools in the area. In only seven years, the resulting program, Leadership for Literacy, has been a huge success. And because of it, the division was recently announced as winner of the Institute of Public Administration

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Dr. Curtis Brown (centre), former CASSA Superintendent of the Year award winner, and Brent Kaulback (right), current NWT Superintendent Association, accept the award on behalf of their school district from jury member Marihyn Scott (left), chief of staff at Centennial College.

of Canada and Deloitte's Public Service Leadership Award.

A large focus of the program is professional development. A literacy coach was hired for each school to give teachers support and training. The teachers were put into learning teams to discuss improving student learning, classroom management and instruction. Parents were invited to visit the school, give feedback to the programs and celebrate their children's success. Elders were looked to for cultural advice and asked to share stories and legends, which were put into a book. As a result of the program, 74 per cent of students in the district, as of 2013, were at or above the Canadian norm for reading level; up from 50 per cent seven years ago. Further, more parents are satisfied with their children's learning at school. Now the district is striving to bring 80 per cent of students to a reading level at or higher than the national norm.

About one of every five educators in the region has received an award for their work since the program began, including a Canadian Superintendent of the Year, a Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence and three Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medals.

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