

Winter 2021-2022

Leaders & Learners

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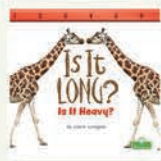
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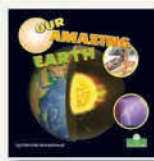
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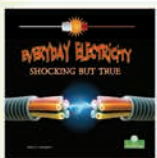
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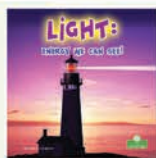
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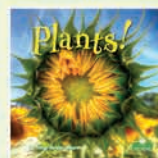
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ON THE COVER

While outdoor learning has been practiced in pockets for years, the recent
widespread adoption of it has us reimagining learning outdoors.
Turn to page 10 to learn more! Photo courtesy of CBEEN.





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Dr. Michael Ryan (World Health Organization) proclaims, “Human collaboration is our superpower as a species” (*C21 Canada* podcast, August 24, 2021). While he was referring primarily to the collaboration of scientists world-wide in the creation of vaccines to protect us against COVID-19, that axiom also resonates for us in sports, education, and in educational leadership as well. We have long recognized the importance of people coming together and contributing their collective expertise and efforts for the benefit of a shared outcome (student wellness and achievement for example).

No successful group runs effectively and achieves its goals without collaboration. I’ve long thought that the most successful leaders are the ones who learn how to ‘facilitate collaboration,’ because that is the best approach to “raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (Burns, 1978).

Our Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) Board of Directors is a particularly impressive group of senior education leaders who collaborate to determine and make progress toward intended outcomes. Recognizing our directors’ workload and limited time, we’ve restricted ourselves to short virtual meetings every four to six weeks. Despite the inherent wisdom in each member of the group, a one-hour videoconference does not provide much time and opportunity to complete the usual reports and business items, bring new members up to speed, build strong relations, promote cross-country sharing, and move us forward collaboratively with our goals.

Thankfully, we’ve benefitted from our partnership with, and the powerful collaboration tool, ThoughtExchange. We try to incorporate at least one facilitated topic for each meeting of the Directors. Over the past year, we have used this idea generation and rating tool to help address several key questions; from celebrating what we’d already accomplished, to revisiting our vision for CASSA for the future, to identifying issues of national significance for which CASSA might have a voice.

ThoughtExchange has been a valuable tool for developing a culture of collaboration, collecting everyone’s good ideas, and bringing the board toward consensus in a very short period. For example, in one live 10-minute exchange we received 40 good ideas, and everyone who participated used star ratings (588 ratings) to show which of those responses to the focus question were most agreed to and supported by the group. In that short timeframe, each member had the opportunity to provide confidential input which helped to drive the decisions and create buy-in to the process. Decisions are more likely to be supported and outcomes are more likely to be met when the chair of the meeting can say, “This is what *you’ve* said collectively and what *we’ve* decided as a result,” instead of, “This is what I think and have decided.”

One of our first live exchanges was in response to a visioning question: What are your hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future of CASSA? The resulting ideas, and the synergy that it created, led to the formation of a small working group with the task of refreshing our vision and purpose, and our new motto, *Equity and Excellence in Education*.

Collaboration also resulted in the theme *Reimagining Education* for the next few editions of *Leaders & Learners*, and the upcoming CASSA Conference at the Algonquin Resort in St. Andrews By-The-Sea, New Brunswick, July 6-8, 2022. We hope to see you there!

Beyond that tangible outcome of gathering ideas and ratings about what is most important, and the resulting discussion about next steps, the emphasis on collaboration has helped us to build an inclusive culture of trust and a sense of community and commitment to CASSA in the process, despite the distance and short timeframe.

Developing new and creative initiatives and moving our schools forward most effectively through this pandemic will continue to require us to use our human collaboration superpowers. Such collaboration requires leaders to know and use facilitation processes and tools that include many voices, generate ideas, stimulate discussion, make



Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

Developing new and creative initiatives and moving our schools forward most effectively through this pandemic will continue to require us to use our human collaboration superpowers.

data driven decisions, and promote collective commitment.

Accordingly, and not surprising, each article in this magazine is about impressive new or improved initiatives that involve collaboration in one form or another, either through connections and conversations, community-outreach, or partnerships. Enjoy the read!

Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

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The December 2020 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publication “Supporting the Continuation of Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic” provided many key insights for education leaders to consider. “For educators, the pandemic is a quintessential adaptive and transformative challenge, one for which there is no pre-configured playbook that can guide appropriate responses. Education leaders must swiftly design responses – and with specific contexts in mind – as the pandemic runs its course.” (<https://www.oecd.org/education/Supporting-the-continuation-of-teaching-and-learning-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>)

The December 2021 online issues of *Forbes* included lessons that everyone, including educational leaders, could learn from the pandemic, including, “Reflect on Lessons Learned, Take Action, and Embrace the Future” (to read more, visit: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/12/27/focus-on-the-future-8-lessons-and-12-quotes-to-get-inspired/?sh=7a530bb6776a>).

This winter issue of *Leaders & Learners* highlights how schools and districts have reflected and embraced the future with their focus on our students’ needs.

We can all agree that the mental health of many of our students has been impacted by the pandemic. Black Gold School Division

has responded with a community-focussed approach. “Are You In or Are You Out?” by Duncan Whittick provides leaders with resources, and real-life examples that have helped the reimagining of outdoor learning – a learning space that has become even more important over the course of the pandemic. “Challenge as Opportunity: Social and Emotional Learning at Caledonia Park School” by Terra Kaliszuk highlights a division that has responded to the need to build and sustain student social-emotional wellness.

Readers will benefit from the personal experiences of an educator in a virtual classroom, discussed in Rebecca Blissett’s “The Power of a Virtual Conversation,” which highlights a Rick Hansen Foundation Program that engages students in meaningful online conversations. In her article, Teresa Di Ninno explores “Returning to a Near Normal” and the way in which one superintendent focused on preparing for the ‘new normal’ post-pandemic reality and how she believes this will positively impact student learning and support mental and social health. “Teaching Students Critical Inquiry and Assessment Skills” by Kathy Miller and Connor Guyn introduces leaders to a free Canadian digital education platform that explores teaching students to identify, learn about, and solve problems through gamification. “A Community Approach: Pandemic Professional Learning with Partner Teachers” by Nadia Delanoy and Amy Burns introduces



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

interactive education that gave voice and solutions for teachers challenged by online or hybrid teaching and student learning, and meaningfully implemented Indigenous Education into classrooms.

And finally, in our Leadership Learning section, Catherine McCullough covers reimagining connecting school leaders throughout Canada in an intentional way to create leadership networks in her feature “Leadership for Equity: Connecting Education Leaders – A Cross Canada Leadership Series.”

My thanks to these innovators and leaders who reflected on lessons learned, took action, and embraced the future.

Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

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Are You In or Are You Out?

Reimagining Education Without Doors



Encouraging daily time in fresh air and nature is incredibly beneficial to the health and well-being of students and staff. Photos courtesy of CBEEN.

By Duncan Whittick,
Canada's Outdoor Learning
Partnership

The pandemic has caused many Canadian educators to reimagine their teaching practice. While outdoor learning has been practiced in pockets for years, and the many benefits are well documented, the recent widespread adoption has caused reason to take note.

Enter Canada's Outdoor Learning Partnership – a pandemic poised consortium of 25 outdoor and environmental learning organizations. Not only has this partnership brought together school boards and organizations, but it has also provided a platform for schools to access excellent outdoor learning resources and equipment with proceeds going back to outdoor learning non-profits that support schools. Additionally, this partnership provides free virtual workshops and podcasts, shining a light on a diverse range of practices and practitioners. Over the past year, more than 2,500 Canadian schools have accessed resources and equipment through this platform, and over 10,000 teachers have registered for virtual workshops.

This collaboration largely took root because of the leadership of a committed group of school superintendents in the Kootenay region of Southeast British Columbia. In 2015, they

Staff can weave outdoor and Indigenous learning together with ease by examining local place-based learning.



came together to prioritize outdoor learning, forming the Kootenay-Boundary Environmental Education Initiative (KBEE). Their efforts were recognized with receipt of the national award for environmental education in 2018, and their Take Me Outside for Learning School Year Challenge has now been adopted Canada-wide by Take Me Outside.

Jennifer Roberts, co-chair of the KBEE, reflected that, "It has been exciting to witness the growth of this initiative and to see the positive impacts in our schools. Teachers report that students are happier, healthier, more connected, and show an increased level of engagement when they are learning in an outdoor environment."

Claire Guy, Executive Director of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA), shared that, "I was

so impressed with the work that the BCSSA leaders from the Kootenay-Boundary region had initiated, I featured them as the very first article for our *InspirED* journal, as it was such an engaging story. The work and commitment have taken off from there and motivated many others across our province to follow their lead."

Connecting with Indigenous perspectives and knowledge

Learning outdoors provides a natural opportunity for students to connect with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. As identified in the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2020), "Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational, focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place."

Faye O'Neil, Indigenous Advisor to Canada's Non-profit Outdoor Learning Store shared that, "I am excited to see teachers and students getting out on ʔamakʔis Ktunaxa learning on the land and experiencing local Indigenous perspectives and legends to help make the connection that we are all related."

Jenna Jasek, also an Indigenous Advisor to Canada's Non-profit Outdoor Learning Store, added that, "Educators can weave outdoor education and Indigenous perspectives and knowledge together with ease by examining local place-based learning. Being outdoors and using Indigenous perspectives provides various lessons all year through seasons, weather, astronomy, water, animals, and how to be stewards of the land. The relationship with the local area and being outdoors provides unlimited space for all learners."

Mental health and wellness

Not only are we less likely to contract viruses when we spend time outdoors, but by going outside we better support the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of teachers and students.

In their provincial education revitalization plan the province of Quebec recently prioritized the objective to "increase opportunities to go outside, exercise, and enjoy the outdoors" as a measure to support well-being and mental health (For Educational Success: Education Beyond the Pandemic, 2021-2022).

In Eastern Canada

The York Region District School Board launched the Get Outside initiative last spring. Over 120 of their elementary schools received clipboards, field guides, binoculars, and hand-held magnifiers to support the exploration of local nature spaces. Educators at these schools are participating in

professional book studies with one of the following books: *A Walking Curriculum*; *Braiding Sweetgrass*; *Messy Math*; *The Big Book of Nature*; *Natural Curiosity*; and *Teaching Kids about Climate Change*. All these resources are available on Canada's Non-profit Outdoor Learning Store.

At the District School Board of Niagara, they believe students enjoy an enriched learning experience when it takes place outdoors. To encourage this, they created an Outdoor Learning Kit for all elementary schools. These kits include resources for teachers and items to inspire wonder in students. An outdoor learning program guide was developed as an easy jumping in point for teachers. Three workshops with outdoor learning expert Megan Zeni were organized and helped inspire our teachers to take their learning outdoors.

As Thames Valley District School Board looks toward offering meaningful connections with their local environments, in Grade 9 Science they are equipping their students with the tools and skills to empower them to collect their own watershed data through stream studies, and then propose questions and courses of action to Conservation Authority partners.

In the Prairies

Prairie Valley School Division encourages teachers to take their classrooms outdoors. The intent of their Outdoor Education programs is to use students' individual and group needs, along with local cultures and environments, to guide the direction of the outdoor activity or experience. Considerations for the principles of "Leave No Trace" and critical land-based learning should always be made.

Regina Public Schools Outdoor Education Department has seen a large increase in

teachers requesting out-of-city field trips. Three hundred and fifty teachers registered to take their classes to learn outdoors. These full day trips are curriculum-based and focused on critical place-based learning, which is then woven into what is being taught in the classroom.

On the West Coast

Nisga'a School District encourages all teachers to spend time outside with their students as the Nass Valley offers an abundance of opportunity to learn on the land. The Nisga'a traditional harvesting calendar provides a guide to seasonal place-based cultural learning.

Cariboo Chilcotin School District is reimagining learning spaces with outdoor structures at all schools. Schools have created gardens, paths into adjacent wooded areas, mud kitchens, and added bikes, loose parts, and other features to entice being out and active. They have found that encouraging daily time in fresh air and nature is beneficial to the health and well-being of both students and staff. ○

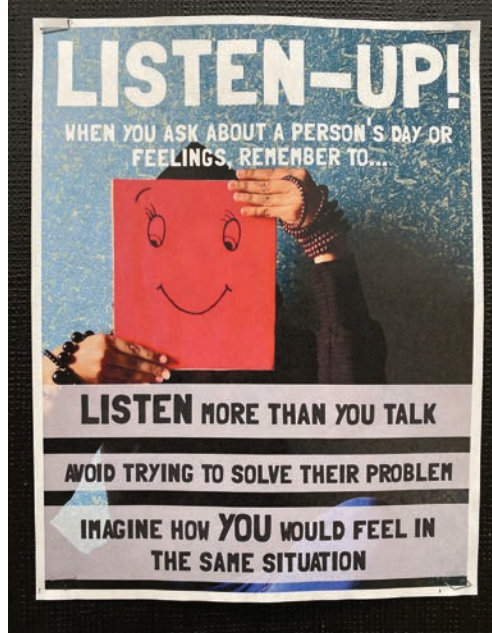
So, are you in or are you out? If you're in, and want more information, please contact Claire Guy, Executive Director, BCSSA, at cguy@bcssa.org; or Duncan Whittick, Executive Director, CBEEN, at info@cbeen.org.

Readers of this story can **enter to win a \$100 Gift Card** to Canada's Non-profit Outdoor Learning Store! Visit outdoorlearningstore.ca/cassa to learn more.

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Challenge as Opportunity:

Social and Emotional Learning at Caledonia Park School

By Terra Kaliszuk, Black Gold School Division

LEFT: The Caledonia Park School SEL Steering Committee created lessons and resources, including classroom posters like this one, to support students in developing their SEL skills. Photos courtesy of Lexi Golinsky and Terra Kaliszuk.

After isolating in classrooms for months on end, the pandemic left our staff at Caledonia Park School in Leduc, Alberta, feeling a bit short on our sense of school community. Many long-standing community-building programs and cross-graded interactions were cancelled in favour of reducing close contacts within the school. As a staff, we were supportive of these protective measures but we were left with an emotional void. We missed seeing each other and our students in classes outside of our cohorts. We missed being together.

Having endured rounds of distance learning, teachers and school staff also noted impacts on our students' interpersonal relationships and wellness. Scanning the landscape of our Kindergarten to Grade 9 school, we realized that not only was our sense of community dwindling, but that our students' social and emotional wellness needed support. As a result, in the 2020-2021 school year, we committed to a three-year journey to build our school community's wellness through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Collaborative visioning

As a Kindergarten to Grade 9 school, establishing a vision for our SEL work required multiple perspectives on our wide-ranging needs. As a result, we formed an SEL steering committee that included representation from school administration, counselling, learning support, teachers from a variety of grade levels, and our Family School Liaison (FSL). Together, we gathered insights from

staff, identified priority areas for SEL support, reviewed research-based programming options, and collaboratively established our vision.

Reflecting on this collaborative vision, steering committee member and Kindergarten teacher Megan White stated, "As a steering committee, we spent a great deal of time collaborating to devise ways to support our students. We understood that grade-level needs would be different, but we also wanted to ensure there was uniformity in our methods and delivery."

Building momentum

With the intention of building momentum and enhancing our sense of community, our steering committee spearheaded a school-wide introduction to SEL through a four-week *Kindness Challenge*. Each week for four weeks, students completed tasks requiring explicit social and emotional skill practice. Week one challenged students to *give someone a compliment*. To support this challenge, our steering committee created resources that explicitly taught how to give effective compliments. At the end of the week, classes nominated students who embodied the spirit of the challenge. These nominees were recognized in school newsletters and a school-wide presentation celebrating students for sharing their complement skills. Community stakeholders supported our recognition efforts, donating prizes for class nominees.

Weeks two, three, and four of the *Kindness Challenge* followed in a similar fashion. Students were challenged to *ask someone about their day, give*

someone encouragement, and tell someone why they appreciate them. With each challenge, teachers received lesson materials to explicitly teach these skills. Following the *Kindness Challenge*, an anonymous staff survey indicated broad-based support for the program. Said one survey respondent: "The students reacted positively when they knew that others in the school were doing the same activity."

We also complemented our SEL challenges with a *Caught You Being Kind!* recognition program. Through staff and class nominations, we recognized students for sharing their social and emotional skills. Nominees were again recognized through school-wide presentations, newsletters, and community-sponsored prizes. Ultimately, our momentum-building efforts focused on celebration, aiming to build a sense of community during a time when we could not gather together.



Kesler Peters, a Caledonia Park School Kindergarten student, is recognized for sharing kindness.

Tailoring supports

Following the school-wide *Kindness Challenge*, our steering committee consulted with colleagues to identify grade-specific social and emotional skills that required support. As a result of this consultation, we created month-long *Division SEL Challenges* – that is, challenges tailored to address SEL skills at different grade levels.

Kindergarten to Grade 3 focused on the implementation of a *Closing Circles* routine. This routine encouraged students to use effective conversational skills. In Grades 4 to 6, students embarked on a *Relationship Challenge* focusing on a different relationship skill each week. For example, students developed social awareness by exploring the impact tone of voice has on communication. Finally, Grade 7 to 9 students completed an *Empathy Challenge* where they engaged with tasks focused on empathy and social awareness of others' perspectives. FSL and steering committee member Nikki Parkes noted that, "By embedding SEL within the school, we are giving kids the opportunity to make lasting changes to bring about greater well-being and happiness in their lives."

Moving ahead

Data-informed decision-making is the key-stone that supports our SEL programming. As a result, we concluded the school year with a staff survey to identify whole-school and grade specific SEL needs. Returning broad-based support for the year's program implementation, respondent calls for whole-school professional learning were also heard loud and clear. Thus, in Fall 2021, our steering committee co-planned and facilitated a session for all school staff focused on the grounding tenants of our work: the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL) SEL Competency Framework.¹

Known as *The CASEL 5*, these SEL competencies offer vocabulary with which to discuss SEL. Moreover, establishing this common vocabulary with our staff created currency for collaborative visioning. Following the session, school staff identified priority SEL competencies for the year. These priorities now drive our monthly explicit SEL supports, including lessons focused on asking friends to play, non-verbal communication, conflict resolution, and empathy in online communication.

Reflecting on our progress, Assistant Principal and steering committee member

Wendy Francis notes that, "SEL is a great way to lay the foundation for positive relationships, especially after feeling isolated for months. Students and staff have realized the power of their words, the importance of being intentional with their actions, and the utility of empathy and compassion in challenging situations. Creating purposeful dialogue about SEL within our school community has been a rewarding experience and it is a direction we will continue."

The pandemic has tested our ability to maintain our sense of connectedness and has created obstacles impeding our social and emotional wellness. Relationships, togetherness, and community are the foundation of Caledonia Park School. Through this work, we aim to face these obstacles head-on, using our social and emotional challenges to create social and emotional opportunities. ○

Terra Kaliszuk is a Wellness Instructional Support Teacher with Black Gold School Division. For more, contact: terra.kaliszuk@blackgold.ca.

Reference

1. CASEL. "What Is the CASEL Framework?" <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/>.

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The Power of a Virtual Conversation

By Hayley Lapierre, Walsh Public School



One of the Rick Hansen Foundation Ambassadors with her seeing eye dog.
Photo courtesy of RHF.

There's a story I like to tell my students at the start of every school year. It's about a boy I once taught. Reading did not come naturally to him, but I discovered that he could take a car engine apart and put it back together. This was at the age of eight! I use this story to make it clear that everybody is different and that this is a beautiful thing.

Nobody deserves to be left out. Diversity and inclusion are essential teaching points, especially around disability. We had a session recently where students learned how to identify and better manage their thoughts and emotions. The instructor was a woman who is hard of hearing. She asked the students to speak directly to her, which helped her read their lips. The kids respected her request and had no problem adapting to facilitate conversation. Having experience with people with disabilities at this age is so important. Not only does it expose children to the one in five Canadians who are living with a disability, but it also teaches them the value of being compassionate and kind. These are meaningful lessons students will carry with them into adulthood.

A fresh perspective

In December 2020, the Grand Erie School District in Ontario marked International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3rd by holding a two-week-long celebration. Part of the celebration included virtual presentations hosted by the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) Ambassadors. I thought this was a great way to show my Grade 3 students at Walsh Public School in Simcoe, Ontario, the value of diversity and inclusion so I booked two presentations with two different ambassadors. RHF Ambassadors are people with disabilities affecting their hearing, vision, or mobility who share

their personal stories about having a disability and their experiences with overcoming challenges and not being defined by their disability.

The presentations really resonated with my students. They asked the ambassadors so many questions that both presentations went into overtime. They particularly connected with the ambassadors when they were shown their photographs at the same age as they are now. I think this was when a lightbulb went off for the kids. I could tell how engaged they were by the thoughtfulness of their questions. They're at the age where they will ask people about their favourite colour or their favourite animal. With the ambassadors, they wanted to know *everything*. They asked questions such as "How do you eat?" and "How do you get out of bed?"

Having the ability to bring people into our classrooms, through the screen, has been fantastic. I focus on the importance of accessibility and inclusion with my kids throughout the year. Introducing them to real people who have disabilities gives them the opportunity to view the world through a different lens. This is so important. After the presentations, we took a tour through our school to note what was accessible and what was not. Because the kids have now had experience with somebody with a disability, they were keenly aware of some of the barriers they might face and they were driven to want to make a difference.

The bright spot in the pandemic has been the discovery of online resources. We've had to rely on them during periods of school closures when classrooms moved online. Having the ability to expose my students to a variety of people who live in different places has been so enriching. It is especially great for those of us who live in little towns where we don't often have the opportunity for in-person experiences. To give you an idea of where we live here in Simcoe, Ontario, we have a population of 14,000. We have a

two-way stop sign, three trucking companies, and nowhere to buy a coffee!

The importance of disability, accessibility, and inclusion

I was exposed to the ideas around disability, accessibility, and inclusion from a young age. My parents worked in health, safety, and disability management, so it was often a topic around the dinner table. I also saw the benefits of inclusion at a young age, too – my Grade 2 teacher took time with every kid and made them feel special. I remember that students could tell her anything, and she always treated the information like it was of the utmost importance. It was life-changing to witness how this compassion made such a difference in the lives of us seven-year-olds, and has since guided my approach to teaching.

This is such a critical time in their lives. Kids at this age look at everyone around them and accept them for who they are. If we can carry on like that, we will create an inclusive society. If they learn about accessibility at this age, this means that everybody can just go with it and be included without having to go back, re-accommodate, or having to plan differently.

By introducing students to disability and inclusion at an early age, we are helping create the next generation of caring and compassionate people. ○

Hayley Lapierre is a Grade 3 Educator at Walsh Public School. Interview conducted by Rebecca Blissett from the Rick Hansen Foundation.

The Rick Hansen Foundation School Program offers engaging resources with lessons and activities about inclusion and disability. All materials are available in both English and French through interactive and online formats at no charge. Learn more here: www.rickhansen.com/schools.

Returning to a Near Normal:

An Absolute Must

By Teresa Di Ninno, CAPE Public Charter School

CAPE's diverse Kindergarten to Grade 9 population has been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions which disrupted learning during the last 18 months.

Anxiety, social challenges, emotional irregularities, behavioural issues, ADHD, learning disabilities of different types, Autism Spectrum Disorders, OT/PT needs, ESL issues, and more are part of the daily lives of our students. Monumental learning gaps were the consequence of repeated learning disruptions, the lack of access to a stable, supportive school environment, stress, isolation, trauma, anxiety, fear, lack of routine, reduction of intensive one-on-one, face-to-face support and intervention, among other factors. These deficits are particularly noticeable in literacy and numeracy.

Sadly, the practice of cohorting significantly reduced student choice, access to off-site learning, and student interactions between mixed-age groups. Students have missed the rich project learning environment for far too long and they are eager to resume these projects. They have also been deprived of proven-effective literacy and numeracy learning opportunities within homogeneous groups.

Our Kindergarten to Grade 3 literacy and numeracy assessments indicate that a significant percentage of our 2021-2022 population requires much more intensive and sustained support. For literacy, 84 per cent of our Kindergarten to Grade 3 students require intervention: 59 per cent severe urgent and 25 per cent mild/moderate. For numeracy, 85 per cent of our Kindergarten to Grade 3 students require intervention: 56 per cent severe urgent and 29 per cent mild/moderate. This is in stark contrast to our pre-COVID-19 June 2019 data that indicated that 19 per cent of our Kindergarten to Grade 9 students required severe urgent intervention in literacy and six per cent required mild/moderate intervention. For numeracy, 28 per cent of Kindergarten to Grade 9 students required severe urgent intervention, while 19.6 per cent required mild/moderate intervention.

Staff has noted that the ability of students to function in a classroom has decreased significantly. Basic skills such as raising one's hand to ask a question, walking in line, following directions, taking turns, demonstrating respectful behaviour, paying attention, and having academic endurance have all decreased. Currently, 49.8 per cent of our students require social, emotional, and behavioural supports, as opposed to 31 per cent in June of 2019.

It is imperative that we return to a 'near normal' program with supports, our daily tiered literacy and numeracy blocks to teach focused skills to homogeneous groups of learners and to involve our students in integrated multi-grade community-oriented projects.

CAPE's COVID-19 Safety Plan aims to keep every person in the building and school community as safe as possible. The Board of Directors invested in precautionary measures, including rapid test kits. Students, parents, staff, and all other stakeholders have embraced our safety protocols, including a choice of providing proof of vaccination or letter of exemption or submitting a negative rapid test. The administration is supportive of and attentive to these safety measures. The staff is responsive to and appreciative of the efforts to keep infections as low as possible.

The tiered literacy program has resumed as in the past. However, the numeracy program is seeing significant changes. We have adopted



*Students involved in the Outdoor Education Project.
Photos courtesy of Teresa Di Ninno.*



A few students working on their forensics blood spatter analysis.

the JUMPMath program school-wide and are engaged in staff capacity-building professional development in partnership with Gael James, our local JUMPMath Outreach Manager, and Dr. Lissa D'Amour, our guide through the Math Minds course. Our numeracy team has expanded to include four new staff members and, under the leadership of teacher Andrea Sanders, is facilitating all aspects of the implementation of this program. The team has also developed, piloted, and implemented an assessment tool to gather accurate meaningful information about our students' written numeracy skills.

Projects are back! One of our current offerings is an outdoor education project for Grades 3 and 4, which aims to engage students in the ecology of our local environment with fun, healthy ways to safely enjoy it. Students will learn about the interconnectedness of the global planet, how human interactions have greatly altered nature and planet Earth as a whole, and participants will develop the skills needed to successfully work as a group in a variety of outdoor challenges. Some of our students chose to register for a forensics project in which they will learn about a variety of investigation techniques used in the

real world and apply these techniques to solve a 'crime scene.'

The very young have been particularly impacted by the imposed isolation. As a result, CAPE has implemented a physical education time dedicated to team intramural sports. Each Friday morning, two of our younger classes play against each other. The desired outcome is physical activity, development of social and fair play skills, and having fun.

Establishing relationships at a time when we are all separated and scared is hugely important. CAPE has entered into a partnership with Mother Earth's Children's Charter School (MECCS) and we are hoping to share information and possibly establish student exchange visits between MECCS and CAPE School during the year. Maxine Hildebrandt's students have already started sharing activities with teacher, Sara Fairbrother's students at CAPE by exchanging "All About Me" posters to allow them to get to know each other.

Both of our Grade 8 and 9 classes have been engaged in a cultural experience with the College Marcel Doret in Le Vernet, France. They are a part of a pen pal program exchanging friendly letters with students of their own age living in the city of Le Vernet,

which is located close to Toulouse. This program allows our students to build relationships with other students while engaging and modelling the English language. The staff is also planning a similar program with a school in Japan involving several grades.

Our school council is investigating safe activities such as weekend dance classes for cohorts of students, parent-student art classes, ice sculpture weekends, and family movie nights where families can safely socialize and establish supportive relationships. This is especially important for families new to the area or who lack adult support systems.

CAPE believes that our safety plan supports the safe return of these programs and that implementation of these and other initiatives will positively impact our post-pandemic student learning while supporting mental and social wellbeing within our school community. ○

Teresa Di Ninno, CEGEP, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., is an alumnus of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Teresa began her teaching career in Alberta in 1980. She is also the Founder, Past Principal, and Current Superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

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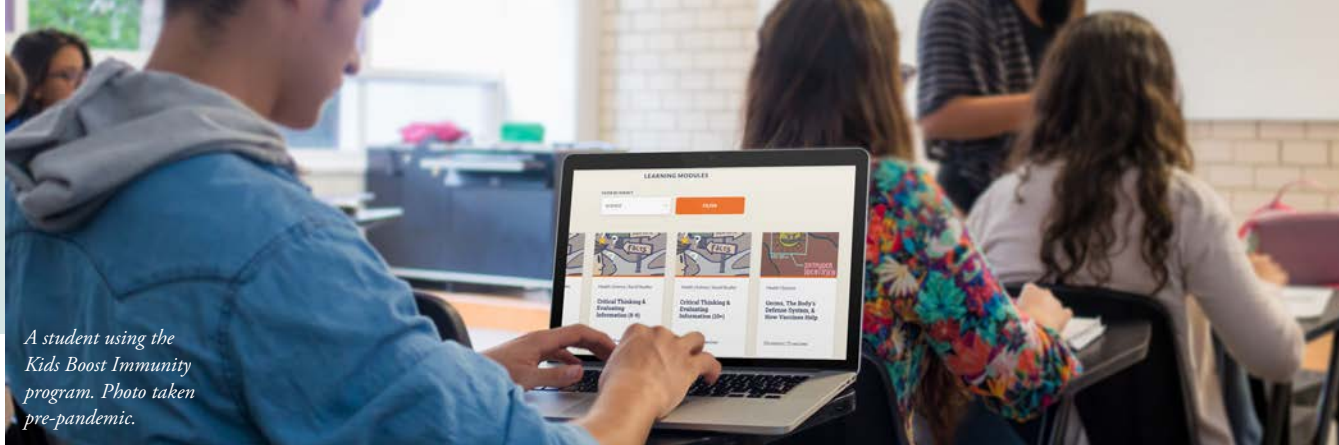


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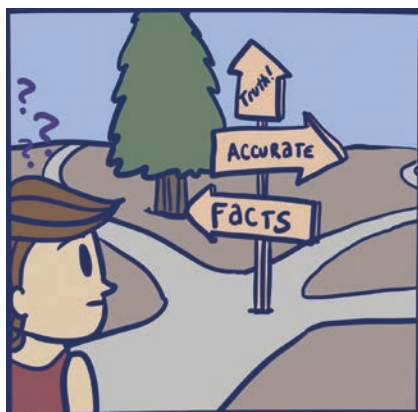
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A student using the Kids Boost Immunity program. Photo taken pre-pandemic.

Teaching Students Critical Inquiry and Assessment Skills

By Kathy Miller and Connor Guyn, Kids Boost Immunity



Truth Fork in the Road image. Photo credit to Armin Mortazavi.

While many lessons have been learned from the pandemic, investigating its long-term impacts and their societal ripple effects have only just begun. Educators see firsthand the harmful effects on their students. How do we support students and teachers in a time of crisis? How can healthcare better respond to immediate and urgent needs? How do we better communicate evidence-based information in a way that doesn't lead to distrust or sway people towards misinformation? These questions are not easy to answer and while there are no easy solutions, there is a good place to start: education.

The ability to interpret, analyze, and process online information has never been so important. Today's students are digital citizens

who encounter more styles and sources of information than ever before. This can be eye-opening but also overwhelming if students don't have the proper skills to critically analyze what they are consuming. Although this has been a long-standing issue for many years, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more evident than ever that digital literacy skills are underdeveloped – both in young people and in the general public. This has resulted in growing rates of vaccine hesitancy fueled by online misinformation.¹ Prior to COVID-19, the World Health Organization listed vaccine hesitancy as one of the 10 largest health risks to the world.² Now, more than a year into the most extensive immunization program in history, we are seeing the real dangers posed by vaccine hesitancy and the divisive, deadly repercussions of a lack of health literacy.

Kids Boost Immunity (KBI) is a free Canadian education platform for teachers that builds digital literacy and addresses the growing problem of vaccine hesitancy by pairing learning with helping others. As teachers developed lessons for KBI, the topic of critical thinking quickly emerged as a vital learning module to support kids in tackling the issue of online misinformation.

Thus, one of the most valuable skills KBI helps develop in students is critical thinking and assessment. KBI's *Critical Thinking and Evaluating Information* learning module is an effectively sequenced series of lessons designed for Grades 4 to 7, 8 to 9, and 10 to 12. Students learn through discovery by reading short fictional news stories (adapted from real misinformation found online).

The lesson illustrates how easy it is to

create misinformation on the internet and to be swayed emotionally to become afraid of even common objects. Students are then shown an evaluation tool called the TRAAP/CRAAP checklist, which stands for Timeliness/Currency, Relevancy, Accuracy, Authorship, and Purpose. A practical example is provided as the fictional stories are put through the TRAAP/CRAAP test and fail! The next series of lessons explain primary and secondary sources, bias awareness, and the scientific method.

For older grades, there are additional lessons on correlation vs. causation and trying to prove oneself wrong. As with all of KBI's lessons, audio, images, videos, and interactive activities are provided to ensure success for diverse learners. Lessons are linked to teacher resources such as lesson/unit plans, worksheets, and answer guides. Skill-building has a cross-curricular application, especially in Grades 4 to 7.

A unique and popular feature of KBI is that learning is tied to social justice and global citizenship. Each time a student scores over 80 per cent on the quiz at the end of a lesson, a vaccine is donated to a child in need through UNICEF Canada. Through this process, students become more invested in learning as they recognize knowledge can have a real-world impact; they feel empowered to help address a global issue from their classroom and realize that they can make a positive contribution as part of a world-wide community. These are not just powerful motivators, but genuine educational outcomes from inspired students experiencing deeper learning.

Another effective form of engagement is the use of leaderboards that add a degree of

“Students get a sense of making better informed decisions after going through the critical thinking lessons. They appreciate the power of the story because they experience it in the real world on social media platforms that try to influence them. Being introduced to the CRAAP test allows students to gather trustworthy information. It builds on scientific literacy and gives them context for addressing issues like vaccine hesitancy.”

– Gigi Fallorin, Grade 8 and 9 science teacher, Hugh John Macdonald School, Winnipeg

friendly competition between students, classes, or schools. Class scores showing the number of questions answered and corresponding vaccines earned are an excellent motivator for learning. Gamification is a proven method for increasing engagement among learners and KBI has taken a measured approach to using competition on the platform.³ There is no direct challenge or ‘videogame’ aspect to KBI, but the slight ‘nudge’ of seeing how your peers are earning vaccines motivates learning and knowledge retention. To reiterate, the academic bar is set high as scores over 80 per cent earn a vaccine, so it requires students to do more than guess their way through a quiz if they want to add to their classroom donation tally. Student success is ensured as they can always retake quizzes.

Misinformation, disinformation, and developing digital literacy skills are issues of

critical importance, and their prevalence during the pandemic will be studied for decades. Additionally, as we move into a world reliant on online connections, young people need help to address the overload of information and opinions that are just a click or tap away. There are no easy solutions to these problems but equipping students with the skills needed to understand how people try to sway their opinion online and the importance of trusting accurate information sources is a valuable place to start.

KBI is available for free for teachers across Canada at www.kidsboostimmunity.com. ○

Kathy Miller is a Teacher and English Coordinator at KBI; and Connor Guyn is the Communications Lead for KBI, Immunize BC, and I Boost Immunity.

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A Community Approach:

*Image from the University of Calgary,
Werklund School of Education
2020 Partner Teacher Professional
Learning Series Offerings.*

Pandemic Professional Learning with Partner Teachers

By Dr. Nadia Delanoy and Dr. Amy Burns, University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education

Throughout this pandemic, educational institutes – whether Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools or post-secondary – had to adapt quickly to the ever-changing teaching and learning landscape. In many ways, according to Perifauno et al. (2021), shifting to online or hybrid means of supporting learners resulted in a positive step forward in relation to the meaningful integration and use of digital and technological platforms.¹ The spectrum of abilities and comfortability with online or hybrid teaching were vast and, in these times, adapting to the new was essential.² Teachers showed their positivity and resilience by continuing to take up new pedagogies in the digital space in order to continue to provide students with high quality learning.

The Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary embraced the shift to the online not only for their students but also for programs and professional learning offerings to

serve stakeholders like partner teachers. Learning that there was still a strong want for professional opportunities to advance learning by teachers was critical to the development of this program. Despite the narrative in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 field that educators were overwhelmed, we were seeing teachers, and, in particular partner teachers, continuing to take preservice teachers and concentrating on areas to which they wanted to continue developing, whether theoretically, pragmatically, or both.

Contextually, the teacher education program regularly places preservice teachers in five provinces and territories across Canada, with approximately 1,300 partner teachers helping support practicum placements from introductory to advanced. Knowing that partner teachers had varying realities, opportunities, and constraints because of these unprecedented times, creating online professional learning embedded in areas of need was at the forefront of the developers' minds. Key learning within the Werklund School of Education was ensuring the professional learning was interactive, evidence



This image is from the Werklund School of Education Indigenous Education Resources, Books to Build on website.

based, and facilitated by educational experts in the field, and focused on informing in real time pedagogy and practice.

The interactive professional learning gave voice and solutions for teachers being challenged by either the realities of online or hybrid teaching and student learning, engaging in wellness practices, and meaningfully and confidently implementing Indigenous education or navigating diverse classrooms. As Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) reiterated in their research around preparing educators during the time of COVID-19, professional learning must be authentic and practical so that teachers can conceptualize how they can apply the practice within their classes to further engage students.² This frame informed the design and implementation of the professional learning sessions focused on meeting teachers where they were at and helping move them forward with confidence, whether in instruction or the ways to support their own needed self-care and wellness.

In the first year of this online and interactive professional learning series, offering sessions to support the development in online pedagogy, wellness, indigenization of education, and navigating issues of diversity in the classroom encapsulated the major themes. Each session was designed to pinpoint challenges of integration and organically discuss realistic interventions and engage partner teachers in authentic conversations of what was real in the teaching and learning circumstances that they were faced with. These open and dynamic sessions created space for teachers to share, use the chat, encourage each other, and pose questions to the presenters.

The facilitators, the majority of whom were all previous teachers and leaders in Kindergarten to Grade 12 education, would prioritize eliciting conversations and interchanges embedded in a solutions orientation so that partner teachers could leave these sessions with tangible resources or teaching tools. For example, Dr. Barb Brown and Dr. Michele Jacobsen, Werklund School of Education, outlined the importance of optimizing online tools such as Google Jamboard and Zoom annotations to support formative assessment approaches within the online environment. In the session dedicated to unpacking how best to integrate diversity into the learning discussions in classrooms, the late Dr. Darren Lund, Werklund

School of Education, shared anecdotes of his own experiences teaching in a high school in central Alberta and how he informs research and practice currently in post-secondary when working with preservice teachers. These sessions cultivated an earnest and personalized learning environment for partner teachers to continue their commitment to capacity building in uncertain times in Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.

This professional learning series not only served to provide personalized learning for teachers but also has allowed for the collection of data aimed at better understanding how lessons learned from the pandemic have impacted the needs of teachers. Of the data collected in the inaugural year of this professional learning series, the following lessons learned from partner teachers reinforced the benefits of these online professional learning series:

- Educators across eight districts and multiple charter and private schools appreciated the capacity building opportunities within a community of practice model. The professional learning series helped them more confidently consider Indigenous education with their students and apply wellness practices to support resilience in teaching.
- The structure of the professional learning series allowed for the time to collaborate with colleagues from a wide array of backgrounds, which fostered the needed support and camaraderie for unprecedented times
- The topics combined with the ease of delivery and interactivity of the online environment provided support for the day to day needs of teachers in their classrooms.

As this series continues to evolve, it is abundantly clear that educators, whether situated in urban, rural, or remote areas, want concrete support and the ability to build capacity in areas such as Indigenous education and wellness. Tangible resources, strategies to engage students, and tools to bridge conversations were among the anecdotes shared by many teachers in the field. Borders (2020) research on professional learning in education asserts that these methods to support teacher development are not a luxury but should be a part of the norm in order to emphasize quality standards or optimal learning environments for students.³

Now, with hundreds of participants and tremendously positive feedback through survey responses and anecdotal comments from the field, this professional learning series is in its second year. We continue to offer tangible and interactive sessions to extend the learnings and resource support in areas such as Indigenous Education, Math Engagement, Wellness, and Literacy Development. ○

Dr. Nadia Delanoy and Dr. Amy Burns are educators at the University of Calgary and the Werklund School of Education.

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Leadership for Equity:

Connecting Education Leaders – A Cross Canada Leadership Series

By Catherine McCullough, CMC Leadership

An accessible virtual learning opportunity, arranged in partnership with the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) and the Learning Partnership hosted specifically for senior educational leaders across Canada, has continued to be offered throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

Building on the success of last year's series called *Leading in Complex Times*, this virtual learning offering has continued to be built on evidence-based research, problem-based learning, professional publications, and practical strategies for leading.

Why is equity our focus?

The previous months of the past school year have been like no other in education's history. As we began to reflect on the impact of this disruption, we found an opportunity for leaders to take stock of not just the impact of the pandemic on student learning and well-being, but more importantly, to consider tangible, evidenced-based approaches for the current school year and beyond.

The pandemic brought to light several urgent issues that affected student equity, student and staff mental health

The speakers from both the *Leading in Complex Times* and *Leadership for Equity* panels.



Meredith I. Honig



Dr. Kimberley Schonert-Reichl



Muhammad Khalifa



Michele Manocchi



Rashmi Swarup



Neerja Punjabi



Yonnette Dey



Farah Slimati



Kenneth Leithwood



Philip Hallinger



Pino Buffone



Janet Stewart



Angie Flynn-McIver



Kevin Lamoureux

and well-being, how to mitigate the digital divide, and the pursuit of more culturally responsive leadership practices.

Staff and students lost family members, others had caregivers whose job and sources of income were impacted, and almost all of us (students, staff, and families) experienced social isolation.

Speakers and topics were chosen based on feedback and urgently identified leadership priorities. Equitable leadership practices are emphasized in each session. In addition, the focus on effective approaches and strategies that can be implemented to optimize support for staff, students, and communities served are provided for discussion and follow up.

To make learning more transferable and to be able to disseminate the resources widely, an online leadership learning platform has been created that provides participants with the recorded sessions, presenter slides, additional publications, and resources along with follow up discussion questions. We intentionally scheduled our first two speakers prior to school opening, and we urged district senior leadership teams to participate as a group to inform their collective expertise and to expand what to consider in their school start up plans.

We launched our series on the topic of *District Systems to Support Equitable and High-Quality Teaching and Learning*, facilitated by Dr. Meredith I. Honig Ph.D., Professor of Education Policy, Organizations & Leadership.

This interactive session examined an urgent challenge facing school districts in Canadian provinces as they return to in-person schooling and begin to answer the following questions: How can districts ensure each school principal has the support necessary for their successful leadership of equitable teaching and learning? What is central office's role in supporting this necessary learning and what does that principal supervision involve day-to-day? How can districts and provinces support principal supervisors' success? This session also explored the current research findings alongside practical examples and why it is now the time for school districts to make those changes. By popular request, Dr. Honig will be returning for a second session in January 2022.

Session two was facilitated in August by Dr. Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl on the

topic of *Prioritizing Social and Emotional Learning for our Students*. This session highlighted the promotion of social and emotional learning (SEL) to transform the lives of students and educators, and gave a guide for understanding how systemic approaches to SEL provide a foundation for developing equitable learning contexts. Implementation and leadership strategies that are successfully being used in districts were shared, including information on how SEL can be promoted as students return to school post pandemic. Practical resources were provided for access by all who attended.

Session Three was on the topic of *Culturally Responsive School Leadership* and was facilitated by Dr. Muhammad Khalifa. Dr. Khalifa explored three basic premises. First, that a full-fledged and nuanced understanding of 'cultural responsiveness' is essential to successful school leadership. Second, that cultural responsiveness will not flourish and succeed in schools without sustained efforts by school leaders to define and promote it. Finally, that culturally responsive school leadership comprises of several crucial leadership behaviours, like critical self-reflection, the development of culturally responsive teachers, the promotion of inclusive, anti-oppressive school environments, and engagement with students' indigenous community contexts.

Session Four with Dr. Michele Manocchi, University of Western Ontario, covered *Intercultural Relationships through the Equity, Inclusivity and Diversity Lens*. Dr. Manocchi addressed the topic of more deeply understanding that inclusion is a process. We explored what inclusion means at the school district level through the lens of leadership. Dr. Manocchi challenged our thinking by describing how to tackle complex social issues, such as equity, diversity, inclusion, racism, systemic discrimination, and implicit bias.

Additional topics that took place in 2021 (but hadn't happened before this article's due date) include:

- *Peel District School Board's Journey Towards Culturally Responsive School Leadership*, featuring the district's senior teams' most innovative approaches to culturally responsive school leadership.
- *Developing a Quality Leadership Development Program with a Focus on Equity*, featuring Dr. Kenneth Leithwood,

Emeritus Professor at the University of Toronto, OISE; and Professor Dr. Philip Hallinger, Professor of Management at the College of Management, Mahidol University, and Distinguished Visiting Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Management, University of Johannesburg.

- *Building Diverse & Inclusive Organizational Culture Through Effective Hiring Practices*, with Janet Stewart, Founder & Principal Consultant of EduSelect.

In January 2022, the learning continues with the theme of *Leadership for Equity Learning*, including topics such as *Crafting Your Leadership for Equity Message – How to Deliver More Effective Messages and Presentations*, with Angie Flynn-McIver, a communications skills specialist and certified leadership coach.

We are also hosting a cross Canada leadership panel of senior leaders who will share their most transformational equity leadership practices, and our final session will be facilitated by Dr. Kevin Lamoureux, University of Winnipeg, Education lead for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and a Scholar in Residence for several school districts across Canada, on the topic of *Healing the Wound with the Weapon: Truth and Reconciliation in Education*.

Our clear purpose by offering this learning series has been to create a cross Canada leadership network of learning, to foster relationships and collaboration among school districts, and to build each participant's capacity and accountability for leadership for equity. Our journey of learning and more deeply understanding the conditions of equity is a critical priority that all educators must continually and deeply assess and seek to understand on a more meaningful level.

By providing accessible and evidenced-based virtual learning we have connected Canadian leadership in education across our country. We will continue to build transformational practices that optimize equitable learning opportunities for all Canadian students. ○

Catherine McCullough, President and CEO of CMC Leadership, is an internationally recognized educator, presenter, speaker, and facilitator.

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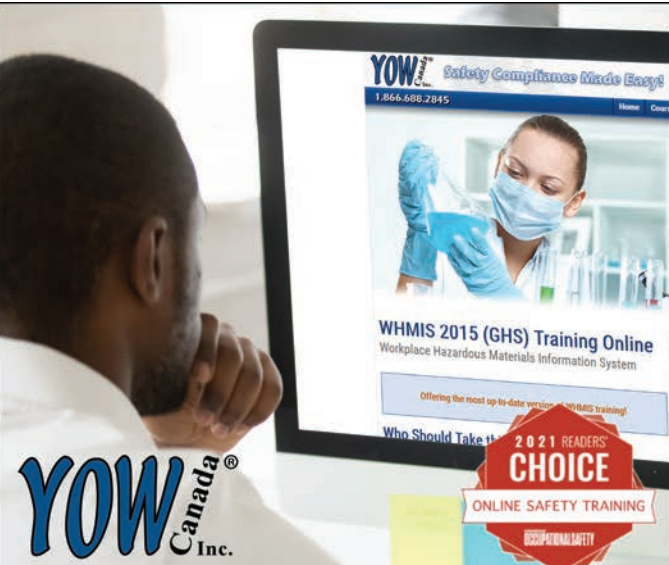


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