

Winter 2011/2012

# Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian Association of School Administrators

Association canadienne des administrateurs et des administratrices scolaires



## *Creativity and Innovation* in Education

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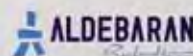
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# Open Your Minds to Creativity and Innovation

**T**his issue *Leaders and Learners* is devoted to the theme of “Creativity and Innovation in Canadian Education.” It contains articles featuring Canadian educators from school districts across Canada who are focusing their attention, energy and enthusiasm on creativity and innovation with students to address 21st century learning skills. On behalf of the Canadian Association of School Administrators (CASA) Executive members and Frank Kelly, Executive- Director, I would like to thank all contributors for sharing their expertise and best practices in this issue.

As Canadian educational administrators, we are aware that human beings are creative and innovative, and that when students enter our schools their minds are open to creating, innovating and learning every day. But what exactly does it take to develop ideas that change the world? Even though neuroscientists have been studying brain-imaging for 15 years, they still have not discovered what defines the circuitry involved in creative thinking. A study at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario is currently underway to determine whether anatomical differences in the brain are related to creative and intellectual powers.

Recently, the world has lost two leading creative innovators, Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple Computers, and Wilson Greatbatch, the designer of the first implantable pacemaker. Steve Jobs has transformed the world inside and outside of the classroom with his technological cultural legacy of online movie rentals, the mobile games industry, touch-screens to tablets, and defining how an entire generation thinks, acts and communicates. As a result of his creative genius, Steve Jobs has shown all of us how creativity and innovation can change education and the world.

Wilson Greatbatch designed the first practical implantable pacemaker in his barn in 1958, a device that has saved millions of lives over the past 50 years. During his lifetime, Greenbatch patented more than 325 inventions including a long-life lithium battery used in medical implants. He shared his creativity with students by visiting schools and speaking to them about his inventions. In 2007 he stated that, “I’m beginning to think that I may not change the world, but I am still trying.” We are grateful to both Steve Jobs and Wilson Greenbatch for their creative and innovative contributions to our modern society.

On World Teachers’ Day, October 5, 2011, I had the honour of being in attendance at the Prime Minister’s Awards for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education, in Ottawa at the Canadian Museum of Nature. Eighty-four Prime Minister’s Awards were presented to teachers and early childhood educators, either individually or to teams from across Canada. All award recipients were recognized as exceptionally innovative leaders for their ability to support students and young children to have the best possible start in life.

All winners received a certificate, a pin and a letter from Prime Minister Harper. Dr. Robert Thirsk, Astronaut, Canadian Space Agency, provided opening remarks about Canada’s space program, and presented the space educator award to Sean Clark of Sacred Heart High School in Stittsville, Ontario for demonstrating outstanding, innovative and creative teaching in the area of space sciences. This event also launched the nomination process for the 2011/2012 Prime Minister’s Awards and information is now available at [www.pma.gc.ca](http://www.pma.gc.ca). I would like to invite you to nominate qualified candidates from your school districts to participate in this notable recognition of teaching excellence in Canada.

Finally, as we continue to provide excellence in Canadian education for all of our students across Canada, I encourage you as Canadian administrators to explore your creative and innovative natures in your daily educational activities. The articles in this issue, along with the work of Steve Jobs and Wilson Greatbatch, and the Prime Minister’s Awards are exemplary examples of the creativity and innovation that exists in today’s world. As committed Canadian educational administrators to the continued growth and development of our students, we embrace creativity and innovation everyday now and in to the future.

Thank you for your continued support of the Canadian Association of School Administrators.



**Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells**  
CASA/ACAS President

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## Creativity and Innovation in Education

**T**his Winter 2011/2012 issue of *Leaders & Learners* brings focus to a variety of programs across Canada that are innovative and leading students to positive learning in a different way. Some innovation is brought on by technology; some is community related; some is the product of thoughtful teachers working in engaging ways with students.

You will see that the innovative programs described in this magazine deal with the arts, with social issues and with teacher training. The common message is that creative staff and students can make a variety of topics appealing.

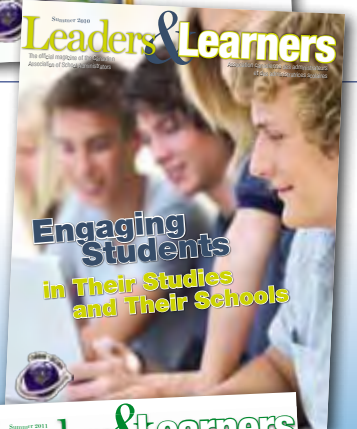
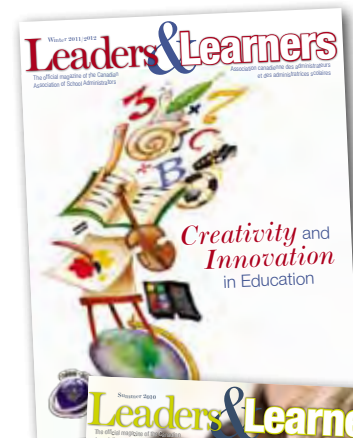
Today, our productivity in education is commonly assessed by the outcomes of our students on standardized tests. There is a great drive for accountability of results and those schools and teachers that fall short on the measured scale are looked upon as not serving their students. No doubt, students wish to have good results and to measure better than their peers in the next neighbourhood. Teachers are proud to show that their instruction has led to better than average achievement on any scale.

What published results usually do not show are the levels of positive engagement and the creative delivery and presentation of content that made a lasting impact on the student and advanced the commitment to lifelong learning. To have a creative classroom, the teacher must risk innovation and students will respond with enthusiasm. Teachers are role models for learning. If they are innovative and allow students to express creativity, the learning process will take on a vitality that is contagious.

Members of the Canadian Association of School Administrators (CASA) must lead the school districts of Canada. They have the opportunity to encourage imaginative approaches in their schools. As leaders, it is important that districts develop a culture of fresh thinking about teaching methods and relating to curriculum. Opportunities are there for better learning relationships, as is shown in the articles in this journal. The digital world provides enhancement and facilitates innovation. It is up to our leaders to insist that there is a regular, positive and accepted place for creativity and innovation in education.



**Frank Kelly**  
Executive Director, CASA



## Write for Leaders&Learners!

**Leaders&Learners is a success because superintendents, principals, teachers, program leaders, board members and educational experts across Canada take the time to share their stories of innovation and success with our readership. There is no better time than the present to say THANK YOU!**

**We would like to invite abstracts for the Summer 2012 issue of Leaders&Learners. The magazine will be distributed to readers in July (and will be available at CASA's Annual Conference, July 5-8, in Whistler, BC).**

**We are hoping to include articles from all regions of Canada!**

### **THEME Creativity and Innovation in Education**

- » Proposals are due February 1, 2012. Please include a 25-50 word description as well as contact information for the author(s).
- » If your article is chosen, you will be notified shortly there-after.
- » Finished articles are due April 27, 2012. If your abstract is chosen, you will be given a word count to stick to. (Please note: if your article is over word count, it will be edited down.)

- » Photos are welcome. They must be high resolution, 300 DPI, and are subject to approval.
- » At the end of the finished article, please include 25-50 words about each author that is listed in the byline (credentials, positions, etc.).

**EMAIL** your abstract to Editor-in-Chief, **Shannon Savory** (ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net). Please be sure to copy **Frank Kelly** on the email (frank\_kelly@OPSOA.org).

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# Backward Future Thinking

Can creativity and technology co-exist?

By Graham Jackson

**S**implify put, I am sweet on technology. I love it all from the silky feel of a touchscreen to the satisfying, resonant hum of a server. I love the change in the way our students (and staff) learn, discover, share, communicate and create. It seems as if teaching and technology is like peanut butter and chocolate, and this probably is the case, but these natural partners also require careful supervision.

For this article I must be the heretic; I offer a gentle caution about the powerful technological drive that is edging its way to becoming an indicator of creative, successful and effective classroom teaching.

## What is technology, really?

So, what's with the belief in technology anyway? Educators occasionally forget technology is primarily a tool and not an entity of itself. Of course, corporate pressure and marketing encourage the public to believe in the *image* of technology and are sometimes seen as an essential benchmark of educational progress in schools and jurisdictions.

In actuality, tools—real tools, that is—have a purpose beyond themselves. Case in point, a classroom desk is a technology that has most profoundly altered education since its monastic origins hundreds of years ago and continues to leave a legacy on the way we teach today. Yet, we seldom think of the desk as a technology and tend to have dim view of the creative options of a desk.

As echoed in countless other blogs, chats, articles and conversations in the staff room, technology is indeed the game-changer in our classrooms. Technology has fundamentally altered accessibility and mobility beyond what was believed possible; the ways in which we now connect have altered the meaning of citizenship (Ohler, 2011). In some ways, I think back to my father's stories of prewar radio or black-and-white TV and think of it as old fashioned and backward, just as my son will smirk when I tell him of a time before cellphones, digital cameras, Internet and Star Wars.

The redevelopment of Blooms Taxonomy to Blooms Digital Taxonomy (Church 2009) is a sign our students are developing into "informational omnivores" (Livingston, 2010), hungrily researching and gathering information at any time and any place. This, of course, impacts teaching and learning in our schools. The Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow Project further requires that not only do our teachers need to engage in technology, but need to follow and be familiar with the stages of technological progression from entry all the way to invention (ACOT, 2008).

So, here's the skinny: We (I) hold an assumption of a forward progression of technology in schools without having any real clear direction of where this is all going. Frankly, it seems a little suspect. How can we know how this will change education until it actually does?



# Our school understands creativity is the key to the future and there can be a place for technology and creativity to co-exist.

## Times, they are a changing

A quick word on change: the new territory of unexpected and unpredictable possibility via technology begins to mould and act upon us, as we, in turn, act upon it, complicating any real clear picture of how this will affect schools. The use of technology such as laptops and smart boards mandated by district and/or provincial decree begins to temper the collective psyche revolving around their usage. Even the language situated around technology reforms the meaning of words and expressions constantly reforming and relinquishing our culture. Our minds cannot comprehend the notion of “endless possibility,” making me again wonder if “technology in overdrive” (Ohler, 2011) is as good as I am told it is.

The construction of “hyper-personalized spaces” (McRae, 2010) further complicates and changes communities and culture by excluding adult members, the members holding key experience and wisdom (Sax, 2009). Schools have encouraged corporate partnerships to prepare students for the world of work. These partnerships, while being valid and realistic, also provide influence from the corporate sector into our schools and classrooms.

This change in workplace expectations is acutely felt by our students, with the focus on information literacy (21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy skills) and technology-fluency (Fadel & Trilling, 2009), which increasingly value people who can use their knowledge to innovate and create, demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving, and have the skills to adaptively self-regulate (ACOT, 2008). These skills, as Daniel Pink (2005) noted, all point to a serious value of creativity and towards a new culture of thinker in the workplace.

## Creativity and conformity

I believe technology and creativity are innate partners. We are all inherently creative in a wide variety of ways (Livingston, 2010), be it exceptional acts or daily activity (Edwards 2000-2001). Creativity, therefore, must be nurtured; schools must agree to be places for learning rather than places

for teaching (Livingston, 2010), and must foster an environment for creativity through creative expression, knowledge and skills (Tillander, 2011).

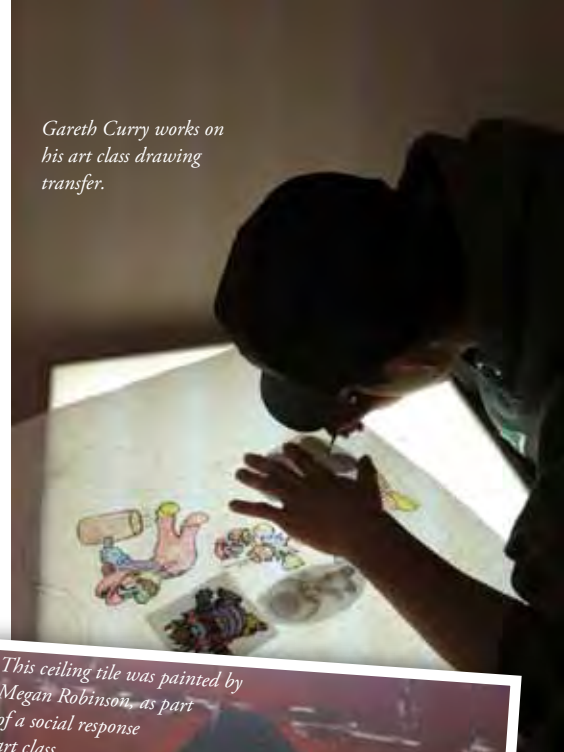
For creativity to abound, problems and tensions must exist (Cross 2002); not answers. Teachers foster creativity and innovation by practices that encourage problem-solving within constraints, open-ended assignments, brainstorming, use of symbolism, conversation and critique (Bryant, 2010). Innovation ensues when an *application* is found for this creativity through the construction of “new ideas, approaches or actions” (Tillander, 2011).

Here’s the thing, the use of technology as a tool for creation may offer more limitations that we are aware of. Technology is capable of directing thought. We operate on the assumption of neutrality of technology. As we are accustomed to using technology, the impact is subtle and constant. Even the green squiggles that Microsoft Office has put under “wrong sentence structure” in this document is encouraging me (quite a bit, actually) to change my writing to the way someone else thinks I should. And it is affecting my final product.

Another example can be found in the countless Google searches taking place in our schools on a daily basis. Google exerts quiet control through query-limitations, privacy issues and selective algorithmic results. Google does not exist in a vacuum and is affected by corporate pressures and partnerships, responsibility to clients (and itself), and cultural bias. Of course, this is not occurring in isolation; we searchers also impact the behaviour of Google. So is it a big deal? Not particularly, especially if our teachers and students understand Google (and others search engines, of course) is not and cannot be neutral.

Conformity also impacts our technology. Schools and jurisdictions spend a great deal of time looking over their shoulder and peeking over the fence to see what current technology is being used elsewhere.

Gareth Curry works on his art class drawing transfer.



This ceiling tile was painted by Megan Robinson, as part of a social response art class.



Steven Paslawsky works on a sketchbook drawing.



The security of consensus and convergence impact the diversity of our schools (De Cock & Jeanes, 2006) and encourages consensus behaviours. These pressures and tensions experienced by Alberta schools tend to make it difficult for schools that work to be or appear to be highly creative, because “difference is now value laden, a shortcoming rather than a viable alternative” (Sauder & Espeland, 2009). The power of the market in technology can also direct creativity. After all, what sells is duplicated. Employer work readiness expectations, as already mentioned, further encourages convergence. I feel in many ways, schools are challenged to make choices in which competition and efficiency becomes an opposing binary to creativity (Edwards 2000-2001).

### Teaching technology

New technology is the offspring of creative practices. Schools that foster rule breaker and divergent educational behaviours naturally foster creativity. It seems as if most teachers are now ready to tolerate the rule breaking of technology but are unclear on the most effective way to use it. Now is the call to increase the risk-taking of our teachers and move from teaching and embedding technology to the

advanced position of teaching *through* technology (Fadel & Trilling, 2009).

### Why technology doesn't work

As a school leader, technology offers constant challenges. Putting aside the issues of technical needs, the greying of boundaries, “cultural autism” of students, staffing, expense, market pressure, the commodification of information and absence of legal Internet guidelines, students prefer technology on their own terms anyway.

If technology is an access point to dissatisfaction, indifference and obsolescence, how does that aid creativity in my school? And where does all of this creativity abound? The pure volume of individuals seeking unique identity (all of us) is overwhelming to the point that creativity can become lost. With the ability for students to “know all now”, the resulting intensification is causing levels of anxiety not yet seen before in schools. Yet, all this aside, we still innately desire to build, create, express and connect.

### Backward future thinking

So, here's what we do. We think backward to think ahead. We honour existing

connections to each other and the community through open access to Facebook, email and texting. We see the value in browsing and wandering online, knowing technology offers foundational literacies (Ohler, 2011) to students. We appreciate the impact of Visually Differentiated Text (VDT) on the way learners create knowledge. We accept and encourage art that has been inspired via technology. We work to remain real and relevant to our learners through relationships and authenticity.

We understand the creativity is present not only in product but in frames of being. In this way, our school encourages our learners to be creative in thought, to view a problem as a possibility explosion and to see roadblocks as an opportunity for choices. We honour one-size-fits-one and expect the same in return. We offer the sensibility of wisdom through adult partnership, modelling, collaboration and learning. We don't retool what we know what is working. Our school motto, *Freedom to Excel*, does just that and returns the creative freedom to excel in what is important to our learners.

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**An addendum**

So, after my ranting and musing about technology, I reflected on this writing by

constructing Lego with my five year old son. As we simul-worked, I watched him with smug satisfaction, knowing I could build him under the table, and, with the right pieces, I could build him down the street.

My construction was a representation of the existing (and, yes, it was finely detailed with articulating pieces and even matching colors). His, on the other hand, was beyond visual identification.

When I asked what he had made, he looked at me like I was an ignoramus. He then explained each function in detail with an endless richness of creativity that took my breath away.

When I showed him my fine masterpiece, he reminded me whose turn it was to learn when he asked me, "But what does it really do, Dad?" ○

*Graham Jackson is the Principal of Outreach High School, located in St. Albert, Alberta. Outreach High School is designed for high school students and adults who want their high school diploma but find it difficult to be successful in a traditional school.*

*A full list of references is available. Email [ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net) for the document.*

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# Creativity and Innovation Beyond the Classroom

By Laura Elliott  
and Janet Tufts

Museum School is igniting a passion to learn about the outside world

**A** college-bound student returns to his elementary school to help with the basketball team. His Grade 8 teacher, remembering him as a below-average student who struggled with reading and writing, is impressed with the change in him. He is succeeding academically and on the path to becoming an electrician. So far there is nothing particularly unique about this story—a classic case of “the light bulb going on” (no pun intended). But how many of us with similar stories can actually pinpoint when the switch occurred?

Anita Quenneville can. Quenneville knows that the turning point for her former student began at The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame during a week of Museum School. The final day to be exact, when the student was “inducted” into the Hall of Fame for a discovery that he imagined himself making in 50 years time. Quenneville remembers the week leading up to the mock ceremony where he was called upon to “dream big and work hard.” Museum School planted the seed for this student to find direction in life and believe in himself.

Established in London, Ontario in 2005 using the award-winning Campus Calgary/Open Minds program as its framework, London Museum School provides elementary children with the opportunity to spend a full week at a museum, returning each day for a series of hands-on, experiential learning activities. These experiential activities result in student success and heightened awareness of the local museum sector. It is a curriculum-based program, available to students in Grades 1 through 8, that combines teacher-planned instructional time with museum-led activities.

A passionate believer in the Museum School program, Quenneville returned to the



Medical Hall of Fame this past fall for the fifth consecutive year. Twenty other teachers in the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) in Ontario, will participate in the program by year’s end, choosing from among six sites including The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame, London Regional Children’s Museum, Fanshawe Pioneer Village, Museum London, Woodstock Museum National Historic Site, and the Museum of Ontario Archaeology.

“We are all filled up for this year,” says Lindsey Foster, London Museum School Coordinator. “The program’s success has caught on. More and more teachers and principals are becoming aware that Museum School improves student writing, problem-solving and critical thinking skills and they want in.”



#### **TOP RIGHT**

*A Grade 7 student stands proudly with 2011 Medical Hall of Fame Laureate, Dr. Calvin Stiller, after her “induction” into the Museum School Hall of Fame.*



#### **MIDDLE**

*Big smiles from a budding Grade 4 artist as she presents a painting created during Museum School. It was later a part of her class’ art show.*

#### **BOTTOM**

*Grade 6 Museum School participants take time to journal as they hike along the Thames River in London, Ontario.*

Last year, students completed a persuasive writing assignment (letters and posters) addressing the program's value before and after their Museum School week. Teachers assessed the assignments using a standardized rubric which demonstrated the following results:

- Eighteen percent more students were meeting or exceeding grade level expectations according to The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8 Language document after their Museum School experience;
- Student assignments consistently showed an increased enthusiasm and understanding of how history, culture, science and the arts influence their lives today; and
- Sixty-two percent of students showed an increase in their understanding and appreciation of museums.

"While the numbers are impressive, it is the stories and samples of student work that continue to have the greatest impact," says Laura Elliott, TVDSB Executive Superintendent, Program Services. "Students are clearly getting the opportunity to slow down, observe, reflect, and make connections to the world beyond the classroom. I see evidence of this over and over again in their daily journal-writing and drawings."

Many students come from families that have the opportunity to engage in out-of-classroom experiences, such as museum visits, and whom naturally create the link between the classroom and the world around them—but many do not. One student, as part of his Museum School week, wrote in his journal: "Today we got to go on a nature walk around the Thames River. We saw lots of animals and birds that I don't think I've ever seen before."

Sometimes the Museum School experience extends past the actual week spent at the museum. Last spring, after creating numerous art pieces at Museum London (an art gallery), a Grade 6 class from Ashley Oaks Public School organized an afternoon art exhibition in their cafeteria. Working together, the students hung their art around the room in groupings with written interpretive notes beside many of the pieces—like you see in a real art gallery. They prepared food for a reception involving parents, other classes and Museum School

fundes, and practised their public speaking as they welcomed the guests and described their work. The teacher met many parents for the first time and they remarked that they now understood why their children were so excited about their Museum School week.

"It was like magic," says teacher Heather Schmidt. "First, the students learned concepts and theories from the art curriculum, then they saw how artists apply the theories, and finally, they became artists themselves."

Inviting the Museum School funders to the exhibition was a brilliant move. "Funding has been an ongoing challenge from the very

beginning," says Janet Tufts, Chair of the Museum School Collaborative. "The more we can involve our funders, the greater the likelihood of sustainability as there is no denying the program's return on investment."

The fee for a class to attend Museum School is \$1,500 (plus bussing). Most schools do not pay the fee thanks to the generous support of a myriad of corporate, government and community sponsors and partners, including both local school boards. Bussing remains the responsibility of the class, partly to enable them to have a sense of ownership and accountability.



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“Managing so many sponsors takes time and energy. One major sponsor would certainly alleviate pressure,” Tufts added. “We’re not far off from achieving this, especially now that both school boards are so committed to the program’s success.”

With 466 students from TVDSB benefiting from Museum School last year, and more expected this year, Elliott explains, “We are thrilled to be partnering with our local museums in this exciting and innovative initiative, and hope that we can serve as a leader for other communities to initiate similar models. We believe passionately that Museum School inspires our students to be thoughtful and contributing members of society as they continue to grow and learn.

As an educator, nothing could be more important and satisfying.”

Museum leaders, teachers, parents and administrators could go on and on about the value of Museum School but no one could capture it better than this particular student: “Some lessons should be taught outside of the classroom because if you think about it as a flower in the process of blooming, it is bound to open up. So are all the students. They cannot remain inside forever. They need to explore the world and get to see things in real life. Thank you to everyone at Museum School for being the water to help all of us flowers bloom and experience things that we will remember for a lifetime.” ○

*Laura Elliott is the Executive Superintendent of Program Services at the Thames Valley District School Board in Ontario. For further information, contact Laura at [laura.elliott@tvdsb.on.ca](mailto:laura.elliott@tvdsb.on.ca).*

*Janet Tufts is the Executive Director of The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame and the Chair of the London Museum School Collaborative. For further information, contact Janet at [jtTufts@cdnmedhall.org](mailto:jtTufts@cdnmedhall.org).*

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# The Magic of the Renaissance Program



An innovative idea teaches students the power of making the world a better place

By Brian Swirsky

**A**s we all know, there is no level playing field in our classrooms and not every student can fit into the same generic,

academic, high school mold. Whether it is learning difficulties, behavioural issues, family problems, or recreational drug use that has devolved into something more than recreational, it is evident that “some of these kids are not like the others”, to quote Sesame Street. As educators, we have the power to create alternative molds and give students, who have given up on their academic abilities, a second chance. This is the magic of an alternative program within the school setting. It is a school within a school, offering a second chance to those who want it. Where I work, it is called the Renaissance program.

Eight years ago, I was given permission to build a new alternative program for John Rennie High School, located in Pointe Claire, Quebec. I had already been teaching and running the school’s former alternative program, Inner Circle, which I inherited when I began my teaching career four years

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**We reminded all who would listen that it’s ok to dream big and that there is no such thing as failure when you set out on a humanitarian mission.**

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earlier. After much reflection, I decided I needed to build a program that coincided with my fundamental educational beliefs, of which the first was to make school fun. It stands to reason that if a student has fun at school, they’ll want to attend. If they have regular attendance, they’ll complete and hand in more work. Since they’re already at school and doing the work, why not put in a little effort and this, in turn, leads to higher marks. This then raises the level of self-esteem.

With this fundamental philosophy, I laid out the parameters that would enable this chain of events to unfold. In a nutshell, the Renaissance Program would be a two-year, grad track program for students at risk of dropping out, getting kicked out, or falling through the cracks in the educational system. The only way into the program is if the student takes the initiative and inquires about the criteria and how to apply. In my

mind, if it is the student and not the administration of the school, or their parents forcing them to come into the program, the battle is already half won.

What the program offers in order to help these students succeed is a smaller class size (roughly 16 to 18 students per grade level), which allows for more one-on-one, three teachers who teach all subjects, stricter rules, and finally, no homework. All school work is done during the school day, which means each and every morning, all of the students in class are at the same place and the teacher can teach to the “whole” and not only to those who have completed the assigned work. Students needing extra time or more one-on-one receive it on Friday afternoons when students who are up to date and in good standing are dismissed early. Our no homework policy is still key to the success of the program, but should not be the sole reason for a student to apply.

Finally, because so much learning takes place outside of the classroom, we add to the mix a fair amount of field trips (including a three day camping trip to begin the school year), guest speakers and community projects. One of my goals has always been to make good citizens of our students and to teach them how they can give back to the community. Our latest project was an attempt to break the current Guinness World Record for the largest food drive, which stands at 559,000lbs; roughly 18 tractor trailers full of soup.

Let me put this in context. For the last 10 years, my students and I have started the school year by hosting a food drive to help Dans La Rue, a Montreal organization dedicated to working with and helping street kids. Traditionally, I teach my students about Dans La Rue and what it means to be under 21 and homeless. From there, my students go into the school and visit the roughly 40 homeroom classes to educate their fellow classmates about Dans La Rue and encourage them to participate in the upcoming two week food drive. On average, we collect between 4,000 to 7,000 cans of food.

In 2009, at the end of our traditional food drive, I expressed my desire to do something different; to raise the bar so to speak. Sue Medleg of Dans La Rue said, "How high do you think you can raise the bar since you and your students collect more than any other school?" I instantly had the answer: "We're going for the record! We're going to collect more than anyone has ever collected."

You won't ever know what you are capable of until you set the bar too high. Little did I know what my students and I were in for. Along the way, we learned about fundraising on a large scale, promoting events, getting the media on board, transportation, logistics, permits of all sorts, paperwork, convincing an entire school board we were serious and this was not just an idea in the wind, and lastly, purchasing the necessary food.

Though naïve at the beginning of our project, my students and I learned as we went and persevered in the face of adversity. Along the way, we reached out to over 30 schools in our board and educated many. We reminded all who would listen that it's ok to dream big and that there is no such thing as failure when you set out on a humanitarian mission. Although we didn't break a Guinness World Record, I think in the end we gained so much more. Terry Fox did not accomplish his goal, but instead succeeded far beyond his wildest dreams. That analogy was not lost on anyone who helped with our project.

As teachers, we have the power and ability to show our students that to make the world a better place, all we have to do is be willing.

My students and I have received many accolades in the weeks following our project and although we appreciate the acknowledgment, we refer to ourselves as the ordinary class who took on an extraordinary project. Today it was us, tomorrow it could be you. No idea is too big. ○

*Editor's note: While the students did not break the Guinness World Record, they were able to collect a whopping 160,000 pounds of food, which will keep the shelves of Dans La Rue stocked for years to come.*

*Brian Swirsky is the Renaissance Coordinator at John Rennie High School, located in Pointe Claire, Quebec.*

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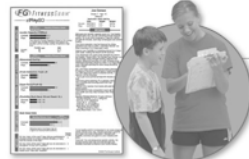
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# Putting Creativity and Innovation to the Test

In the face of disaster, creative teaching shines through as policies and procedures go out the window and caring for a community becomes the number one goal

By Carol Lemay

**O**n May 15, 2011 the lives of the people of Slave Lake, Alberta changed forever. A wildfire fuelled by dry conditions, high speeds and shifting winds, crossed the highway and hit the community. The citizens had only minutes to gather together their families, pets and some mementos and evacuate the town. Stories of how they got out, the heroism of the firefighters and people who stayed behind, and those who took care of the evacuees, leave only one thought—My God, everyone survived!

Our little Catholic School Division has two schools in Slave Lake: St. Mary of the Lake, a K-12 school; and St. Mary's Outreach. Principal Trevor Mitchell informed me that the town was being evacuated and we waited and watched the news to find out the extent of the devastation. Our concern was for everyone, the staff and students from our schools as well as their families, and we had so many questions. Where were they? Were they safe?

*A sign of welcome in Westlock as the people and businesses of the town open their hearts and homes to the evacuees of the Slave Lake Fires.*

*Photo courtesy of YourAlberta's photostream at [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com).*



How many lost their homes? And, of course, because we are a school division, what will happen to the rest of their school year? We also waited and watched reports to find out the fate of the schools themselves.

Fortunately, we live in a connected world and one thing most everyone took with them when they left their homes was a cell phone or a computer. Thanks to Principal Mitchell and Deputy Superintendent Jo-Anne Lanctot, it wasn't long before we knew where all staff and all of our high school students were. Within two days of the devastation we were informed by Alberta Education that there would be no expectation that children return to school for the rest of the term, and students who were expected to write Provincial Achievement Exams and Diploma exams were exempt. That was great since re-entry into the fire ravaged town didn't begin until two weeks later. We didn't know the results for all students' families, but 12 of our staff members lost their homes.

Those are the basic facts and timelines. They do not, however, tell the huge loss and the long term process of re-entry and re-building. We had to be sure that we were taking care of our people. Policy and procedure go out the window when staff and students are suffering great loss. One lesson learned is that policy and procedure can add to the stress. Rather than requesting time sheets and attendance records, we emailed and contacted all staff that they would be paid regular salary for the two months left in the school year. And we invited them to come back to work if they could on June 6, 2011. Despite personal tragedy and the option to remain away from work, all but two staff members returned in June. Many were living in campers, hotel rooms and with friends. At that time the school administration and staff re-opened the schools for students to return and provided them



*What's left after the fire tore through. Photo courtesy of YourAlberta's photostream at [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com).*



*Students engaged in a cross-curricular activity.*



with an education based camp. In addition, St. Mary of the Lake School became a reception centre for re-entry into the community, a symbol of stability and hope.

So many unspoken questions remained: What would happen in the fall? How many students would return? What would the impact be of four months away from school? Where do we start?

Our Living Waters goal is that that every child who enters our doors will graduate successfully from a faith-filled, safe and caring environment. St. Mary of the Lake School and

St. Mary's Outreach have been dedicated to that goal. However, the high school completion rate in Slave Lake is very low and many students are at risk due to transience, low socio-economic conditions, etc. The school community has a wide cultural diversity with many aboriginal students and there is a vast range of skill and ability.

Even prior to the fire, the staff of St. Mary of the Lake, well aware of the reality of their students and that dropping out is a process not an event, applied to get involved in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project offered by Alberta Education. Transformation in

education is a concept encouraged by Minister Hancock and this particular project. Using this approach, the staff radically changed how teaching and learning would take place. The main focus of their work was to ensure that every student would be taught at his/her level of competence and that there would be no gap in the children's skill development. High school teachers work in teams, (humanities, math/science, options) focussing on achieving the major outcomes and skills in a cross curricular program. These teams plan, assess student achievement and teach together. Working with the students to find success and relevance



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in their education is primary, since high school completion is the goal.

Elementary teachers also work in teams and they have found ways to plan, teach and assess student work together. Students freely move into different groupings based on skill level and understand that they will be working in a classroom with teachers committed to their success and growth.

At the time of the crisis in Slave Lake, this new structure and focus was still in its developmental stages and certainly not without its critics. The Board of Living Waters, however, believes firmly in the new transformational

changes and is determined to support them. We know that we cannot consider ourselves truly successful until every child, no matter the culture, conditions or family circumstances, graduates successfully and is ready to enter the world of tomorrow.

The four month break in the students' education and the long range view for rebuilding is putting the creativity and flexibility of the new school and divisional focus to the test. However, the staff prepared themselves well, and by finding strength through adversity, they have gained even greater purpose. Systems are being realigned in order to

bring on our third school, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Learning Center, which will house the FLEX program. Administration of the three sites will be done by a team approach. A student services team will provide support for all students in all schools, and a number of other systems will provide continuity and successful transitions for all students.

In terms of this year, the flexibility project and the new approach to education have allowed the staff to absorb the aftershock of this tragedy with surprisingly minimal disruption. It provided the flexible and creative structure to do what needed to be done to look after our students. One month into school and the children are back in their routines, grouped according to level of achievement and tackling new challenges. Staff members are working in their teams, examining diagnostic screens in reading and mathematics, planning programming and working together to help students succeed—fire or no fire. ○

*Carol Lemay is Superintendent of Schools for Living Waters Catholic Regional Division No 42. She was assisted in her work by Trevor Mitchell, principal of St. Mary of the Lake School and St. Mary's Outreach in Slave Lake.*

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# SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO SCHOOL



By John Burger, Teresa Cardinal, Todd Hennig, Brenda Valerio, Cathy Ziegler and Anna Nadirova

**R**ocky View Schools (RVS) is engaging in action research on innovative ways to measure students' affective school experience using the new Student Orientation to Schools Questionnaire (SOS-Q). The SOS-Q was developed by researchers in the Alberta Department of Education in cooperation with the Parkland School Division (Nadirova, Burger, Clarke and Mykula, 2008) and was subsequently acquired by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for marketing and administration support (see [www.etscanada.ca/afl/sosprogram](http://www.etscanada.ca/afl/sosprogram)).

The upper-elementary version of the SOS Q comprises five factor-based constructs including: Safe and Caring School, Self-Confidence, External Resilience, Internal Resilience, and Peer Relationships. The junior-senior high school instrument encompasses the same five sub-scales plus Extra-Curricular Activities and Utility of School. For students who are employed in remunerative jobs, Work and School Integration and Handling Work/School Pressures are included.

Rocky View became interested in using the SOS-Q data in 2010-11 to enhance students' connection to school, achievement and high school completion. Over the course of the year the SOS-Q was piloted in four schools; in three schools the survey was anonymous and in the fourth student's identities were obtained to permit individual follow-up.

Practical and potential applications of the SOS-Q data are described in the following observations by staff in the participating schools.

In the Spring of 2011, a RVS middle school administered the SOS-Q Survey to 120 Grade 7 students. The Principal noted: "We had done significant work in culture-building over the past four years, however, we felt that we still had a group of disconnected students who were displaying a lack of affinity for school or schooling. Using the data from the SOS-Q to determine a baseline for identifying students who felt disconnected from school, we used the National Sub Scales norm minus one standard deviation to identify students whose SOS-Q profiles were significantly below average.

"This process identified 17 students or about 14 percent of the cohort population fell at or below one standard deviation in

the category of Safe and Caring Schools. Twelve of these students also felt that school was not useful. Seven of the 17 students thought that school was not a fair place and also expressed doubts about their self-confidence to succeed in school or life. Seven of the 17 identified students worked and five felt there was little connection between school work and future career plans.

"The SOS-Q confirmed our impressions that we had a group of at-risk students. Further, the responses to some of the questions yielded valuable data that we had not been able to glean through other sources, such as extra-curricular participation, internal resilience and self-confidence."

A second middle school administered the SOS-Q to the entire student body. The principal's rationale was premised on her observation that middle school years are a challenging time for many students: "Supporting the affective domain is of utmost importance during this phase of life. This is why we opted in to utilize the SOS-Q. We wanted to gather data that would give us a picture of where our students are most challenged. Our results showed that our students responded very similarly to national norms.

"However, we do see some significant variations from the national mean in the Safe and Caring (Grades 5 to 8), Utility at School (Grades 7 and 8) and Self-Confidence (Grades 7 and 8) areas. We have started addressing these needs in a variety of ways including a Positive Support and Intervention Plan. Our staff has been working in a shared decision-making and shared leadership culture—in four leadership teams—that are evolving to include students and parents.

“By becoming involved in the school and community, many students who have felt left out or not part of the community will have a purpose and start to feel more self-worth and value. This will evolve to the wider community and then more globally over the next three years.”

The SOS-Q also was administered in a K-9 RVS Christian alternative program school that is the first Canadian school to achieve National Lutheran School Accreditation. The principal observed: “While we use many sources of data to help us evaluate our success in the area

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## Rocky View became interested in using the SOS-Q data in 2010-11 to enhance students' connection to school, achievement and high school completion.

of instructional design, measuring school culture, specifically how students perceive themselves fitting into the culture, is more elusive. The SOS Q has helped us by providing specific feedback in this area.

“Our goal to build a culture that allows students to thrive in a faith context has everything to do with building a safe and caring school, individual self-confidence flowing from understanding themselves in light of faith and leadership, building both internal and external resilience, finding purpose in life while seeing a connection between school and that purpose, and experiencing positive peer relationships. These are all areas measured by the SOS Q and the feedback we receive from this instrument is one more tool we use to assess our success as a school.

“As we move forward with the use of this survey, we see potential value in using the instrument to identify specific students who are not experiencing the culture we intend for them. We will then be able to address the areas where they do not feel supported and work diligently to fill the gaps, ensuring that every student feels valued. The use of the SOS Q is all about ensuring we are actually living our mission.”

The SOS-Q was also administered to 37 Grade 9 and 11 high school students who had a history of course failure, poor attendance, minimal parental support or lack of school engagement. Staff shared their observations of this process: “Parent approval was sought and parental feedback indicated relief that the school was supporting their child, as well as parental feelings of helplessness in assisting their children in the educational sphere. The students were engaged in meaningful conversation before the SOS-Q was administered and this process generated some immediate changes including: referrals to outside agencies and changes in high school programming.

“Based on the SOS-Q results several follow-up actions are being implemented including: enhanced tracking of program outcomes via a Mahara e-portfolios, enrollment in a Moodle course on Learning Strategies, engagement with a career advisor, field trips to post-secondary institutions and work sites, off-campus physical

activities and re-engaging parents. The SOS-Q could provide valuable post-treatment evaluation of these support strategies.”

Based on the positive assessment of the benefits of SOS-Q use in Rocky View Schools, consideration is being given to incorporating the SOS-Q at the individual level for all RVS students in Grades 4, 7 and 10 as timely information for identifying students who are at risk of disengaging from school. The SOS-Q data would be entered into a dynamic and balanced Student Information System and would serve as a key resource in supporting RVS as an evolving research organization focused on better meeting students' needs. ○

*For additional information on RVS's action research with the SOS-Q contact Dr. John M. Burger at (403) 945-4019 or email jburger@rockyview.ab.ca.*

*John Burger, B.Ed., B.A., M.Ed., Ph.D. is Director of Schools with Rocky View School Division in Airdrie, Alberta.*

*Teresa Cardinal just completed her M.Ed. and has been working at Rocky View as a teacher, guidance counselor, and currently Learning Specialist: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit.*

*Todd Hennig is principal of Prince of Peace Lutheran School in Calgary, Alberta. He holds a M.Ed. from Concordia University, Nebraska.*

*Brenda Valerio is currently the Principal of Meadowbrook Middle School in Airdrie, Alberta. She has a B.P.E. and B.Ed. from the University of Calgary and M.A. in Educational Leadership from San Diego State University.*

*Cathy Ziegler, B.A., B.Ed., M.Sc. has been an administrator of bilingual programs with Rocky View Schools for 20 years.*

*Anna Nadirova is a Senior Research Officer in the People and Research Division of the Alberta Department of Education in Alberta.*

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# Take The Pledge to End Bullying

A creative approach to stand up to and stop bullying brings together the entire community

By Julie Maltby



**B**ullying is a problem that has a harmful impact on the entire community. The issue has been made more complex with the pervasiveness of online bullying via social media, e-mailing and texting. In a 2009 Statistics Canada survey of Canadians aged 15 and older, nearly 10 percent perceive themselves as victims of cyber-bullying.

*The Pledge* is an inclusive initiative that seeks to raise the public's consciousness about bullying—in schools, at work and at home—by bringing the community together to recite the words that represent its commitment to help end bullying:

"I believe that everybody has the right to live in a community where they feel safe, included, valued and accepted regardless of differences. I pledge to be respectful of others and stand up against bullying whenever and wherever I see it."

The extensive campaign was led by the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) and CTV London with representatives from the London District Catholic School Board (LDCSB), local anti-bullying coalitions and community organizations committed to bringing an end to bullying.

Every community struggles with finding

effective ways to address bullying. Members of the Thames Valley community decided it was time to take a coordinated and innovative approach. Schools, businesses and organizations across Elgin, London-Middlesex and Oxford counties were encouraged to create at least one opportunity for their members (including students, employees, customers and volunteers) to come together to take *The Pledge* before or during Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, which ran from November 14 to 18, 2011. The number of people who have taken *The Pledge* are tracked on a website dedicated to the campaign: [www.ctvnewslondon.ca/thepledge](http://www.ctvnewslondon.ca/thepledge).

Members of the organizing committee personally contacted more than 100 organizations to encourage them to take *The Pledge*, but that was just the beginning. In

a coordinated effort to reach as many individuals as possible, the media collaborated to provide unprecedented support of *The Pledge*. Local television, radio and newspaper outlets ran public service announcements, interviews and stories about bullying and how citizens could take *The Pledge*.

Mandi Fields, Community Relations Co-ordinator at CTV London, co-chaired the initiative with Julie Maltby, TVDSB Public Affairs Officer. "Never before has there been an initiative like this in London and surrounding communities involving all media organizations to directly address the devastating effects bullying has on our community. We're thrilled that each organization involved has taken the pledge to work together on such an important initiative," Fields says.

Senior staff of the TVDSB are also



This photo was taken at Jack Chambers Public School in London where they held a moving assembly on November 17. Photo credit: Blair Robertson.



This photo was taken at the Thames Valley District School Board Education Centre on November 14 at 10 am when schools across the district were holding assemblies to take *The Pledge* to end bullying. About 170 employees at the Education Centre took *The Pledge*, led by Director of Education Bill Tucker. Photo credit: Jason Rake.



This photo was taken at Saunders Secondary School in London at an assembly on November 14, where former Toronto Argonaut Chuck Winters (left) joined London Mayor Joe Fontana and a number of students in adding to the school's wall of messages about what they stand up for. Photo credit: Steve Kerr.



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enthusiastic about taking a lead role in *The Pledge*. Superintendent Barb Sonier, who oversees Safe Schools across the district, says, "Our Director's vision was for the mobilization of the entire community to wrap itself around the problem of bullying. Our challenge is for everyone to be an 'upstander', to stand up to inappropriate behaviours. Taking *The Pledge* is one way in which students and staff members demonstrate their commitment to a safe, caring learning environment."

John Mombourquette, LDCSB Superintendent for Safe Schools, echoes Sonier's comments. "From the Catholic system's perspective, we welcome *The Pledge* as an opportunity to engage the broader community in a vibrant discussion on identifying concrete ways to ensure safe and inclusive schools where students see themselves as builders of peace who recognize the gifts of each of their peers."

Mombourquette refers to St. Robert Catholic School's "Bully Chargers" club as one example among many in area schools where students take the initiative to prevent bullying and promote positive behaviours by encouraging a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Students and staff at Mountsfield Public School in London took a similar pledge of their own in February, 2010. Principal Patti Baker says she has seen a positive change in attitudes at the school ever since. "I think the kids are definitely more reflective and considerate. They stop and look at how they can make a difference. If you speak it, you own it. I think it's an ongoing process but the pledge opened up the communication."

In May, 2010, following the tragic death of a St. Thomas student, Bill Tucker, TVDSB Director of Education, established the Director's Community Task Force on Anti-

**“Our challenge is for everyone to be an ‘upstander’, to stand up to inappropriate behaviours. Taking The Pledge is one way in which students and staff members demonstrate their commitment to a safe, caring learning environment.”**

Bullying. Twenty-nine leaders in organizations that deal with bullying partnered with the Thames Valley Board to collectively address the complex issue. A Report to the Community, released in June 2011, summarized their coordinated strategies and initiatives to take action against bullying today and in the future.

Communication and collaboration have been important aspects in the ongoing action to end bullying behaviour and its negative impact in Thames Valley communities. With the support of caring individuals—in schools, businesses, non-profit organizations and the media—members of the Thames Valley Board and the Task Force knew they could have an impact. It was determined that raising awareness of bullying prevention was one effective way to address the issue.

Tucker says awareness can change attitudes and behaviours. “Thirty years ago, people were drinking and driving without giving it a second thought. With the help

of public campaigns like Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, people no longer see it as socially acceptable. We believe *The Pledge* can have the same kind of impact on people’s attitudes about bullying.”

CTV London, as a member organization of the Task Force, pitched the idea of the community-wide campaign. “We proposed the idea of *The Pledge* in an effort to empower the community to do something about the problem of bullying,” Fields says.

Organizers believe *The Pledge* is the first campaign of its kind to engage the entire community. While they recognize that an awareness raising campaign isn’t enough to eliminate bullying, they are encouraged by feedback that indicates *The Pledge* has people talking about the issue. *The Pledge* website will continue to be updated with resources, stories and names of individuals and organizations committed to end bullying.

Social media has also been used to spread the word about *The Pledge*. Facebook users could find the official page at “The Pledge to end bullying” and a member of the organizing committee tweeted frequently about the campaign at Take\_ThePledge on Twitter.

In addition to the awareness raising campaign, organizations involved in the Task Force continue to take action by working together to develop and continue effective strategies and initiatives in a community approach to address bullying.

The Thames Valley District School Board and CTV London are grateful for the commitment of resources from media partners, committee members and the community that has taken *The Pledge* to end bullying. As of December 17, following an enthusiastic community campaign and Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, 70,000 members of the Thames Valley community had taken *The Pledge*. ○

*Julie Maltby is the Public Affairs Officer with the Thames Valley District School Board and Co-Chair of The Pledge. She has worked in the education sector for 12 years in communications, fund development and alumni relations roles.*

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# Staging the Visual Arts

By Aurian Haller

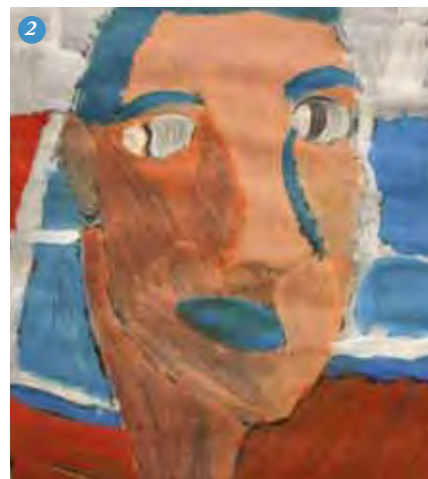
**T**he performing arts are easy to crow about. They dance across the stage and raise their voices. The visual arts, on the other hand, wait to be noticed. And yet, as Henri Matisse famously said, “Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence.” That permanence is unique to the visual arts.

The Central Québec School Board is a geographically immense board with schools from Kawawachikamach (in the north of the province) to Thetford Mines (in the south) and everywhere between. That’s a lot of room to lose yourself as a young artist. So, Central Québec School Board recently launched its Virtual Art Gallery (VAG) (<http://vag.cqsb.qc.ca>) to respond to a real need to bring students together (at least virtually) through the visual arts and to recognize their amazing gestures.

There has been a flurry of new research on the importance of the arts for brain cognition, social development and behaviour. As Charles B. Fowler argues in *Strong Arts, Strong Schools*, “Students involved in the arts are more motivated, more engaged, more sensitive, and more focused, creative and responsible.” There is no doubt that promoting art in the classroom leads to smarter, more balanced students and future citizens.

The challenge for educators is to put these findings into practice. For the Central Québec School Board, this challenge has been met through various programs such as Culture in the Schools and board-wide performing-arts festivals. However, the visual arts have not traditionally had a stage on which to strut their stuff. The VAG offers this opportunity.

The gallery is essentially a website where students can have their artwork exhibited for all their fellow students and the general public to see. The site includes visual arts such as painting, sculpture, drawing and collage, in addition to photography, video and even creative writing. It accepts student submissions



1 Student Mural. CQSB Performing Arts Festival 2010. Photo by Tjerk Bartlema.

2 ‘Self Portrait’, by Jordan. Grade 4. St. Vincent Elementary School. Oil Pastel.

3 ‘Shout’, by Kathy. Secondary 5. Québec High School. **Editor’s note:** Students created multimedia postcards and sent them to students at a school on Cortes Island, BC. They are awaiting postcards back from the BC students.

from teachers who have selected student work that demonstrates excellence in a given genre; in other words, work that is inventive, inspired and technically competent.

When artwork is uploaded, it is exhibited with only the first name and the grade of the student, the title of the work and a process blurb, which describes the context of each work, its influences and the materials used to create it. The gallery is designed to allow students to share their work with other students and to provide a venue that takes student art seriously, so that kids can already begin to identify themselves as budding artists. And, of course, the gallery is an excellent resource for teachers who are seeking inspiring projects for their own classes. Students can find other students by name, by school or simply by genre or the materials or influences used.

The evidence of inspired teaching is everywhere on the classroom walls and down the halls. The challenge is to encourage teachers and students to use the gallery as a teaching and learning tool. As the

curatorial reins are in the hands of the site’s administrator, it is up to the teachers to photograph the artwork and send jpegs to the curator to upload them. Some schools, however, may have limited access to digital cameras, or not have correct photography techniques, or may have only a limited knowledge of sharing and sending files. Central Québec School Board is working hard to provide the resources and technical support to make this process as smooth as possible for teachers.

These are small steps to promote the arts in our schools but the response from teachers and the expressions on the faces of young artists who can look up their artwork online tell us we are heading in the right direction. ○

*Aurian Haller is a poet and singer/songwriter, as well as a music teacher and arts consultant for the Central Québec School Board in Québec City. Haller’s latest book is Song of the Taxidermist (2011) and his new album is called Normal Town (2011).*





# Learning Through the Creative Process

By Derek Lidstone and Shelley Baier



**C**reativity and innovation are often cited as skills essential for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is a natural prognosis as futurists predict a world of unprecedented

challenges but also of exceptional potential. Beyond the advances of technology, the distinction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the new nature of information which has evolved to be abundant, easily accessible and, in digital format, easily manipulated. As a result, the measure of success will no longer be the accumulation of information but the mastery of it through interpretation, combination, manipulation and application. This is the arena of creativity.

With this objective, St. Patrick Fine Arts Elementary School chose to focus our three-year, Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) project on Encouraging Creativity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner.

Creativity is commonly considered as an elite trait of a fortunate few. Researchers, however, recognize that it is a natural human reaction to solve problems, albeit, with consequences that span a spectrum of competency. Creativity results from a variety of abilities that can not only be developed, they can be taught.

Although it is often associated with “right-brain” traits of artistry and holistic

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**“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.” Alan Kay**

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thinking, creativity actually demands functions of the entire brain. It is a balance of three separate abilities: synthetic ability to recognize, link and generate possibilities; analytic ability to inspect and select best options; and practical ability that guides ideas into reality. In various areas, everyone has degrees of these abilities. In isolation, however, productivity is hindered by the aimless dreamer, the overly critical and the impulsive racer. Balance and flexibility between the abilities is required but this is the challenge and seemingly elusive nature of creativity. The abilities are polar mindsets shifting between divergent and convergent thinking. Practice and experience are needed to increase the flexibility of creative thinking.

To guide and encourage these skills in our students, we designed a creative process to display and discuss in every classroom. The stages include *Defining* the challenge, *Dreaming* of possible solutions, *Deciding* the best choice, and following through in the *Do It* stage. Innovation is the implementation of creativity but should really be considered as a stage of it. Although

creativity is an imaginative process, it must extend into results—construction, enacting, voicing—otherwise, it remains creative potential. As the final stage of our creative process, students are encouraged to *Reflect* on their choices and the results. Throughout this structure, they are reminded to monitor their progress, refer to previous stages and to back up and adjust if needed.

Process terms are discussed with students and strategies are provided, such as having students list what is known of the problem, effective brainstorming, collaborative sharing, ranking criteria, monitoring progress and always reflecting on their choices and results. The intention of the process is to motivate students who are frequently hesitant, uncertain or blocked for inspiration, and also to restrict those students who impulsively rush an initial, undeveloped idea to completion. Either route impedes creativity.

In our school students also benefit from the inclusion of the Fine Arts, not only as separate subjects but as a possible learning mode for any content. Creativity is not exclusive to the Arts, however, they are a synesthetic stimulant—combining sensory experiences. In learners, this helps connect experiences and expand possibilities. For instance, mathematical angles are better appreciated by acting them out.

In its simplest mandate, this project promotes creativity as an option in the classroom through common dialogue, specific strategies, questioning styles and allotted time. It is used for large projects and for simple problems, in any subject where the manipulation of information helps students gain personal understanding. More than a single set of skills, creativity is a mindset. It is an engaged response to reality; a disposition to accept challenges with a calm belief that a solution is possible. This is surely a necessity for the future. ○

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*Shelley Baier, Principal, St. Patrick Fine Arts Elementary School in Lethbridge, Alberta.*

*Derek Lidstone, AISI Lead Teacher at St. Patrick Fine Arts Elementary, worked in the architecture and design industry before becoming an educator.*

SPECIAL FOCUS



# Innovation Supports Student Graduation

By Rob Bell and Melanie Ferdinand

**T**he Student Success program in Ontario has focused on improving high school graduation rates by providing new initiatives that

allow for individualized support for students who struggle in high school. As part of the Student Success program, the Grade 12/12+ Student Re-engagement initiative was devised to help students who had left school recently and were missing graduation requirements in the areas of credit accumulation (one to four credits short of the required 30 credits for graduation), completion of mandatory literacy testing and/or completion of mandatory community involvement hours.

Based on case management principles derived from the social service sector, the Thames Valley District School Board model for the Re-engagement initiative utilizes a coordinated interdisciplinary approach to service delivery, focusing on meeting the identified needs of individual students. At the centre of the model is a Social Worker, who functions as a case coordinator. Social Workers take a holistic approach to service, helping the student at individual, family and community levels, with expertise in relationship development, assessment, case planning and intervention, as well as advocacy. The Social Worker is supported by a system level team including experts and decision-makers from the realms of Alternative Education, Student Success, and School Counselling and Social Work.

As the initial point person, the Social Worker contacts students who are missing the noted graduation requirements. Once the Social Worker has engaged the students and assessed the needs, cases are presented to the interdisciplinary team on a bi-weekly basis. The team identifies possible options to help each individual student

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**The success of this program is a testament to collaboration, creativity and a belief that students can achieve!**

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meet their graduation requirements, while respecting the specific challenges which the student may be facing. The Social Worker then follows-up with the student to implement the plan and provide ongoing support. Throughout the project the team found that engaging students in alternative education programs was a successful strategy. As a result, in addition to a Social Worker and system level support from the school board, funding was allocated to increase the capacity of the alternative education school to provide flexible programming for re-engaged students.

The students who fell within the parameters of the Re-engagement initiative had been faced with challenging life circumstances such as poverty, illness, familial obligations, transportation and traumatic events, which interfered with the completion of the graduation requirements.

The model is perhaps best demonstrated through the following examples.

- A young man was two credits short of the required credits to graduate. He had left school prior to graduation as his parents were ill. Financially, he needed to work to support the operation of the rural family business. He was able to complete a credit through a co-operative education program, and another credit through recovery of a previously failed course. He graduated with his class last fall.
- A female student was missing the literacy requirement. She was able to complete the literacy course through an alternative education school and graduated on time with her class.

- A young woman suffered several family tragedies, including the death of a parent and a house fire. She left school in the spring of her final year to seek employment as she needed to support herself. She needed four credits to graduate. She completed three of these credits through a co-operative education placement and her final credit through the alternative education school. She went on to attend college.

During the 2010-11 school year, 337 students were contacted through the Student Re-engagement initiative. Of those contacted, 254 students re-engaged in secondary school and 169 graduated. The initiative continues to contact recent school leavers in 2011-12, as well as provide follow-up support for those who were contacted or re-engaged last year but did not graduate. The success of this program is a testament to collaboration, creativity and a belief that students can achieve! ○

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*Rob Bell, M.Ed., is the Learning Coordinator for Student Success and Guidance, grades 7-12, for the TVDSB. Rob worked as a secondary science teacher and Student Success Teacher before joining the system level staff team for the school board.*

*Melanie Ferdinand, MSW, RSW, is the Coordinator of School Counselling and Social Work Services for the TVDSB. Prior to joining the Board, she spent almost 25 years working with at risk youth in the correctional and youth justice sector, in administrative, program and direct service roles.*

# Choice, Equality and Dialogue: Instructional Coaching in Black Gold Regional Division

Since 2009, Black Gold Regional Division has engaged Instructional Coaches to work side-by-side with teachers in our division. As noted by Jim Knight (2009), instructional coaching “provides intensive, differentiated support to teachers so that they are able to implement proven practices” (p. 30). Let us share how instructional coaching is moving BGRD to the forefront of student-centered learning.

- Dr. Norman Yanitski – Superintendent of Black Gold Regional Division No. 18.

By Denise Harrison, Terra Kaliszuk, Greg Luchak, Michael Skoreyko and Steve Trueman

**M**eaningful learning is unmistakable in Larry Mackiewich’s Grade 5 classroom, where students’ discussion over a wheat field photo settles into a Socratic debate over the question, “Which natural resource is more important—wheat or dirt?” They trade opinions, stand on chairs, whisper to peers and, in the end, create their own meaning. This student-centered construction of knowledge is the cornerstone of the work of Instructional Coaches and teachers in Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 (BGRD).

Located just south of Edmonton, BGRD encompasses 27 schools servicing over 9,000 students. Funded through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), the team of five Instructional Coaches (ICs) has quickly become a vital teaching and research tool for teachers and students.

According to Knight and Cornett (2009), “Instructional coaching focuses on providing appropriate, sufficient supports to teachers so that they are able to implement scientifically proven teaching practices,” (p. 193). ICs operate from this foundation of research to plan, connect and reflect—they work on-site with teachers to co-create engaging, student-centered experiential learning opportunities. ICs also provide time for division colleagues to share ideas and facilitate continued, intentional professional reflection. ICs are flexible, adaptive and work with all disciplines and grade levels, meeting teachers where they are at, with what they need.

BGRD teachers, like Larry, work together with their IC to create a highly personalized PD experience through Knight’s (2011) Partnership Principles (p. 28). Through these principles, teachers have *choice* of participation and

curricular focus of the work. There is also recognition of *equality* in the relationship, with both parties sharing expertise as they engage in ongoing, pedagogical and reflective *dialogue*. The product of this professional partnership is the creation of research-based, instructional materials ready for classroom implementation.

For example, Larry Mackiewich approached his IC with a desire to engage his class in a student-centered approach to the regions of Canada. Using substitute release time, Mackiewich was freed from the classroom to collaborate with his IC. Together, they created a unit plan, prepared the introductory materials and co-taught the lessons. In addition to Mackiewich’s implementation, this material was shared via the IC and modified by several other teachers for use in their own classrooms.

Ultimately, students are the primary beneficiaries of instructional coaching, as teachers and ICs work to provide students with an experiential approach to make meaning from curricular outcomes. In his book, *Teaching for Tomorrow*, McCain (2005) suggests that we should “equip students with real-world, problem-solving skills” (p. 15). In his opinion, “[p]lacing new information in the context of a real-world scenario provides the frame of reference the mind needs to retain that content” (p. 24). With these suggestions in mind, LA 9 teacher Kevin Haugjord and his IC asked students to write to a fictitious company regarding a faulty product. Students then examined their own written responses and created success criteria for effective business communication, including: “tell the problem specifically”, “ask for a specific solution”, and avoid being “too emo [sic].” The teacher reported that the students not only discovered their own understanding of the outcomes but were “incredibly engaged” with the process.



BGRD Social Studies 5 students examine patterns in Canada’s physical geography to extrapolate possible borders for Canada’s regions.

BGRD instructional coaching is a process with deliberate intent. Larry Mackiewich and Kevin Haugjord worked with their ICs to achieve specific student-centered goals and, as a result, their students had focused, engaging and meaningful learning experiences. Through planning, connecting and reflecting, ICs bridge educational research to the classroom, adapt effective research-based strategies and support teacher implementation, enhancing learning for all students.

For more information on the work that ICs and teachers do, and the projects that they create, please visit the BGRD website at <http://engagingstudents.blackgold.ca/>. ○

*Denise Harrison is the AISI-PD Coordinator for Black Gold Regional Division who works part time as an Instructional Coach. Terra Kaliszuk, Greg Luchak, Michael Skoreyko, and Steve Trueman work full time as Instructional Coaches for the division.*

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# Creating a Culture of Innovation

By Brant Parker and Stephanie Chan

Over the past five years, technological devices and applications have become increasingly pervasive in all aspects of our lives, expanding into the daily experiences of students and educators in schools. A few years ago, it was uncommon for students to use smart phones in classrooms, access wireless Internet through personal laptops and learn using interactive white boards. Educators and students did not often use blogs, learning management systems, multimedia sharing sites and social networks. These significant changes spread sporadically and inconsistently across the educational realm, presenting a challenge that we accepted: To develop and foster a culture of continuous improvement, innovation and professional learning.

*Learning as unique as every student* has become the mantra of today's Calgary Board of Education (CBE). It reflects a system-wide mission to create conditions for every student to achieve success through learning environments that are responsive to their unique abilities, knowledge and interests.

Naomi Johnson, our Chief Superintendent, recognizes the significant role that technology plays in an innovative education system. In 2009, she established *Learning Innovation* (LI), a service unit dedicated to supporting innovation across our district's 225 schools. Within this service unit operates *Innovation and Learning Technology* (I&LT). I&LT brings together people who have specialized knowledge along three dimensions: Learning Specialists with strong teaching skills and experience leveraging educational technology; support staff with extensive experience selecting and managing educational resources; and technology support professionals.

Our mission in I&LT is to inspire, advance and improve teaching practice and learning environments through encouraging, enabling, supporting and assessing innovation and technology that is aligned with board priorities and leads to student success. Our 15 Learning Specialists are divided into four leadership groups called *Contribution Pathway Teams* (CPT):

## 1. Digital Infrastructure for Learning:

Develops and manages infrastructure that supports digital resources and technology.

## 2. Transforming Teaching Practice:

Helps teachers and students realize the educational potential and benefit of digital resources and technology.

## 3. Professional Learning and Research:

Develops formal and informal professional learning supports and programs around digital resources and technology.

## 4. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:

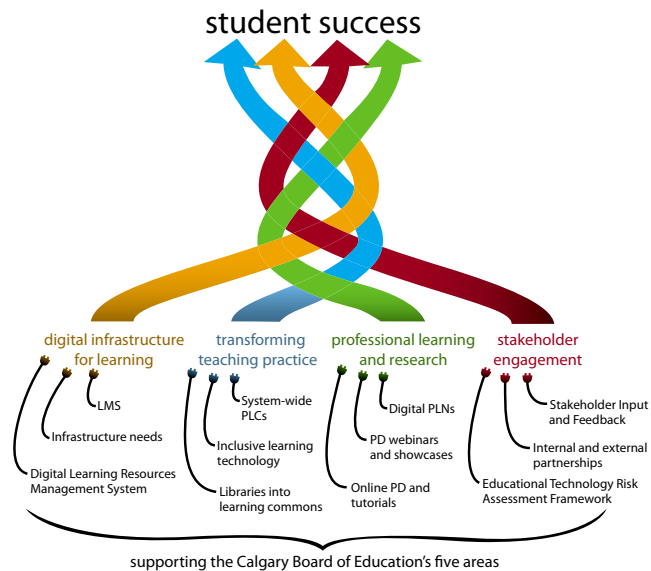
Delivers information and updates throughout the system and gathers input that helps guide the work of I&LT.

CPTs work in a fluid, collaborative and integrated manner. The teams are self-empowered and self-directed; they are responsible for examining system priorities and identifying the greatest opportunities where they can apply their strengths and perspectives. Each CPT meets weekly to discuss their progress and next steps. In addition, all members of I&LT meet bi-weekly to collaborate on work that spans multiple teams on a broad scale. I&LT work falls under two categories: system-wide implementation and Area support.

Examples of our work include:

- Implementing a Digital Learning Resources Access Management system that will allow educators and students to search, use, and contribute to multiple educational resource databases from a single point of entry.
- Managing our learning management system and expanding its impact on learning.
- Supporting school use of inclusive and mobile learning technology.
- Developing an Educational Technology Risk Assessment framework to support decision-making by system and school leaders around new and emerging technology.
- Transitioning libraries to learning commons.

## Innovation & Learning Technology



- Developing and implement online professional development programs.
- Hosting and organizing system-wide educational technology professional learning communities and focus groups.
- Supporting each of the five areas that make up the CBE to achieve their specific priorities and goals (each area includes an Area Director, System Principal, a multi-faceted Area Learning Team, and 40 to 60 schools).

Innovation often arises on the fringes of existing paradigms. At the Calgary Board of Education, we are committed to fostering innovation across *all* parts of our organization. We believe in the purposeful application of educational technology to personalize student learning. *Learning Innovation and Innovation and Learning Technology* reflect our continuing mission to foster a system-wide culture of innovation and advancement as we build learning environments that support all students. ○

*Brant Parker is the Director of Innovation and Learning Technology with the Calgary Board of Education and is also the founder of SchoolSoft Technologies Inc.*

*Stephanie Chan is a Senior Learning Specialist responsible for supporting innovation in the area of professional learning and research within the Calgary Board of Education.*



# Student Success Starts with a Well-Prepared Teacher!

By the CQSB Teacher-Induction Team

**T**he Central Québec School Board (CQSB) is the board with the largest territory in the province of Québec—493,495 km<sup>2</sup>—or 30 percent of the province. For more than a decade, CQSB has been preparing and delivering a unique and comprehensive Teacher-Induction Program. Its approach and strategies have drawn favourable attention from school boards province-wide, as well as from the Québec Ministry of Education.

While recruiting and retaining teachers is an issue for most boards in the province, it is a *constant* challenge for an English school board that is spread out over such a large and often-isolated territory. It is something that CQSB takes very seriously. Pierrette Laliberté, Director of Human Resources states, “I am a great believer that the success of our students starts with the success of our teachers.”

With an emphasis on professional growth, the program uses a hands-on approach and is based on practical information meant to make new teachers feel welcome, prepared and ready to enter their new classrooms. New teachers partake in dynamic, interactive training which includes reflecting on teacher accountability; what makes an effective teacher; results-based management; the Québec Education Plan; using information technology in the classroom; and building a learning community. And that’s just to start! Classroom management is a particular focus, an element which, according to Laliberté, “Is not always provided sufficient emphasis in university teacher-training programs.”

Because many newly-recruited teachers hail from other parts of Canada, they are provided with comprehensive information about the structure of the Québec education system, as well as the requirements of school boards in Québec and policies specific to

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**“I have never heard of a school district providing such great training. Usually teachers have to ‘figure it out’.”**

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CQSB. New teachers also receive important information regarding legal qualifications, contracts, pay, fringe benefits, leaves of absence, sick days, etc.

The training team is impressive: it includes professionals and administrators from Instructional Services, Complementary Educational Services and Human Resources. Teachers are also greeted by CQSB’s Chairman of the Council of Commissioners and the Director General. In addition, they are provided with the opportunity to meet with their union representative. Teachers spend the final day of the week-long program with the school principal of the school in which they will be teaching: learning about the School Success Plan, the school’s culture and specific information about their workload. The week culminates in a community meal with the entire CQSB Induction Team.

New teachers leave the CQSB Induction Program with a professional growth USB key which has the purpose of ensuring “a common vision of lifelong teacher learning.” Consultants and professionals from Educational Services, having been actively involved in the training of these teachers since the very first day of Teacher Induction, are familiar with each new teacher and ensure continued, individualised training throughout the following year.

In addition to the time required for the CQSB team to organise and deliver this annual event, teachers are remunerated to

attend the program, attesting eloquently to the importance that CQSB places on this training to guarantee the success of its students. It is a philosophy that certainly appears to be working: based on our students’ performance on Ministry Uniform Exams, CQSB was rated as the number one English school board in the province last year. When compared with all 69 school boards in both the French and the English sectors, CQSB ranks fifth overall in the province.

It is fitting to leave the final word to the teachers themselves: One teacher said: “I thought everything was really helpful. I have never heard of a school district providing such great training. Usually teachers have to ‘figure it out’. (I am) really happy with all the effort put into answering our questions!”

Another teacher declared: “Thank you for this amazing week. Even if our faces may show that we are tired at the end of the day, we are really thankful. You helped me enormously in the last few days. I would attend any time!” ○

*At CQSB it truly does take a concerted team effort, overseen by the CQSB Human Resources Department, the CQSB Teacher-Induction Team includes support staff, professionals and administrators from Instructional services, Complementary Educational Services and Human Resources. School principals are also actively involved in the process.*



SPECIAL FOCUS



# Action Research Driving Innovation

By Brenda MacDonald

**W**ith the influx of new technologies, smartphones and “anytime anywhere” learning, there is a strong need to re-examine old ways of thinking and doing things, and of concomitant need for creativity and innovation. The main thrust is to answer the many questions on how to improve student learning and engagement through the use of new technologies, while examining teacher pedagogy and best practices. Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools embarked on the 3D (Digital Learner, Digital Teacher, Digital Classroom) Action Research Initiative in 2010 with volunteer teachers working collaboratively in a learning environment with a passionate commitment to be creative and innovative using a meagre amount of resources.

The action research began with evaluating the current realities, re-thinking the structure of education and training for a new culture of learning to emerge. Innovation requires experimentation, time and resources with a tolerance for failure. In the first year of the research, Red Deer Catholic purchased ipods, netbooks and flip cameras used by 26 teachers and seven 750 students. Teachers had to submit a proposal outlining the curriculum they would be using and how they would implement the equipment in a two and a half month period. The teachers chosen to implement the research received professional development and release time to work together, plan, implement, observe and reflect on the journey. During the planning phase, teachers recognized the need for a collaborative learning space to be used throughout the project. The teachers eventually decided on the creation and utilization of a wiki.

This open innovation and networking was beneficial for teachers to share their knowledge and skills while improving teaching practices with new technologies. Each teacher’s project was unique in both how the technology was integrated and how students engaged in their learning. Teachers explicitly



and incidentally incorporated digital citizenship and 21st century skills, which they found were extremely beneficial to students. The researchers reflected on the context of their own teaching situation and answered questions that dealt with academic matters at hand using the latest technologies. They felt a shared vision and improved collegiality, collaboration and communication among staff. Apprehensive and fearful teachers became confident and empowered and excited to be a part of the expanded 2011 project. The many shared stories and lessons learned were placed on the wiki.

Other significant findings included increased use of different hardware and software by teachers and students, after being a part of the project. Interestingly, teachers assumed that students were “tech savvy” and intuitively knew how to use all hardware and software but soon discovered that students often did not have the skills or background knowledge to use the software or equipment effectively. Explicit instruction needed to be provided on how to use the software or hardware. In addition, teachers realized that students significantly benefited from exemplars and assessment tools prior to implementation. Therefore, moving from a model of teacher directed instruction to student directed learning required increased planning time

but the dividends in increased student involvement and participation were significant.

Overall, the Red Deer Catholic 3D action research approach was extremely successful. Teachers appreciated the right to be creative and take risks in the execution of their lessons with the support of new technologies. The 3D action research initiative continues in 2011 and is smarter, stronger and more robust than in its inception.

The development of creativity and innovation in education requires open structures, strong relationships, ongoing questioning and openness. For this very reason, the exchange of experiences, examples of exemplary practice, ideas and cooperation of students and teachers with diverse backgrounds is extremely powerful. This 3D action research was a user-driven innovation and is an ongoing, interactive process, which applies “learning by using” and “learning by doing.” The wide understanding of the benefits of shared knowledge creation is ideal for education’s innovation. ○

*Brenda MacDonald is presently the Curriculum Coordinator for Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools. The teacher collaborative space is <http://rdcrd3dproject.wikispaces.com>.*



# The Creation of a CTS Module Tracking Chart

By Ray Suchow

This article will detail the design and implementation of a one-page High School CTS (Career and Technology Studies) Module Tracking Chart. This has greatly helped me to visually present and discuss over 25 course modules on one page to students and parents, instead of delving into several curriculum binders on opening day or during parent-teacher meetings. As well, individual course creation and tracking of student progress throughout a semester has become much more efficient with the “at-a-glance” ease of the chart.

My need to create a curriculum visual aid began after the most recent (2009) Alberta Education revisions to the CTS curriculum had been completed. For several years previously, I’d taught a fairly standard set of Information Processing (INF) modules that didn’t require a lot of expanded explanation to students and parents. Most course selections, such as Keyboarding, Word Processing and Electronic Publishing, spoke quite well for themselves. However, with the revisions, a dynamic range of new modules had become available and I set to work choosing the ones that would redefine my program.

In short order, I discovered I needed a tracking aid to keep *myself* organized as I examined hundreds of module descriptions. I wanted to complement my standard set of INF modules by adding introductory computer science (CSE) and several multimedia (COM) modules. I also wished to ensure that the design efforts included several overarching program necessities, such as wanting to provide a structured beginning module for each grade, yet enable a subsequent variety of module choices to increase student engagement—especially with ones that could help enhance potential career skills at the Grade 11 and 12 levels. Thus, my CTS Module Tracking Chart was born.

Created in Keynote (Visio works well on the PC side) and saved as a PowerPoint slide for cross-platform flexibility, the chart includes four significant features. First, the starting

module(s) for each grade, the most important being the first three in Grade 10 to ensure a solid high school skill set and the completion of important prerequisites. Second, a subsequent range of modules to choose from, so students can complete the minimum credit requirement for each term (four in Grade 10, three each in Grade 11 and Grade 12).

Third, the prerequisite guideline-arrows help students to see which modules link to another, thus facilitating long-term planning. And fourth, a red/green/blue color-coding system enhances readability in printouts and monitor displays. After much experimentation, I found that students understood the chart quite well when I explained it this way: “Red shows what you’ve completed, green is what you’re working through this term and blue shows all the modules you can go to next.”

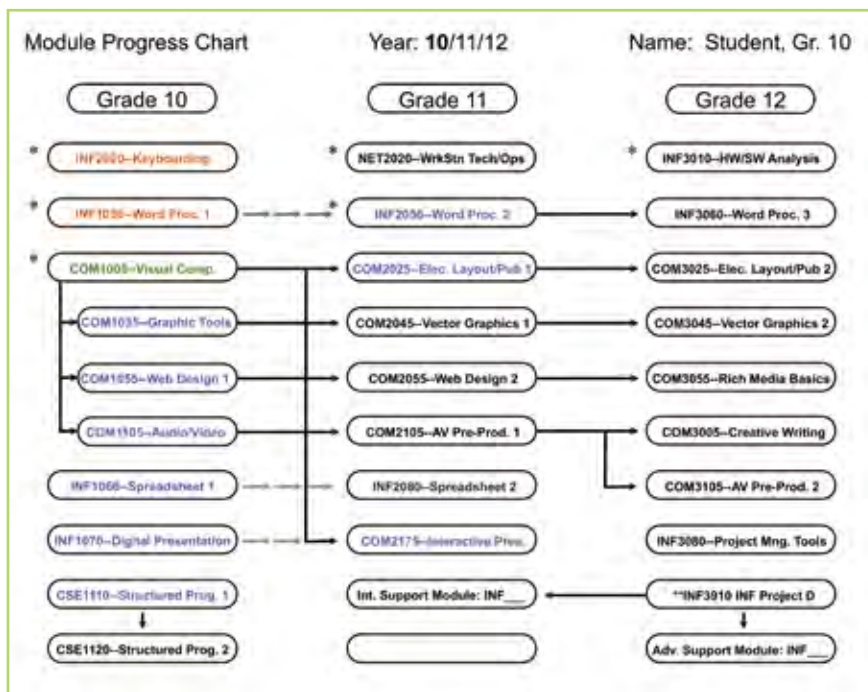
The chart’s effectiveness best comes into play via the ongoing module meetings I have with each of my students throughout a term. As they work through their first required module, we meet individually, discuss and confirm the rest of their module choices, then save their respective chart. This is repeated with each module to ensure they’re on pace to complete it, as well as to record and visually display their ongoing progress throughout the term.

On my side, after each round of module meetings are complete, I’ve created a complete and updated class-set of chart-slides (one per student) in an easily managed file. On the students’ side, they’ve visually reconfirmed where they’re going and how they’re going to get there. A printout can easily be provided but most are content with it being digitally stored yet available to view at any time.

In these ways, from the first module meeting to the last, the chart can transition from a useful planning tool to a continued success-recording tool, thus increasing its usefulness for all involved throughout each term.

This is the first phase of the tracking chart. I’m currently planning an online, interactive version. When completed, students will be able to access their chart, click on each module to read (and/or view) a brief description and complete their course selections. As each module is completed, they could then upload particular assignments to serve as exemplars in a digital career portfolio. The possibilities are endless but it all begins with a customizable chart and some one-on-one with the students you’re empowering. ○

*Ray Suchow teaches Computer Studies (Grades 7 to 12) and Religion (Grades 7 and 8) at Christ The King School in Leduc, Alberta. In 2007, he co-wrote his Division’s proposal for a CTS enhancement grant from Alberta Education, and served as Lead Teacher on its successful three-year implementation. Currently, he is working towards a Graduate Degree in Religious Education.*



### Healthy eating in Ontario schools

In Ontario Bill 8, the *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act*, was passed into law and became effective September 1, 2008. The Policy requires that all food and beverages offered for sale in elementary and secondary schools for school purposes comply with the requirements set out in the policy, including the nutrition standards, by September 1, 2011 (PPM 150).

The Halton District School Board has recently published the *Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Protocol*, which is designed to help schools comply with the Act.

The document is available at:  
[www.hdsb.ca/ParentInfo/Ontario%20Nutrition%20Standards%20for%20Schools/Healthy%20Food%20for%20Healthy%20Schools%20Protocol%202011.pdf](http://www.hdsb.ca/ParentInfo/Ontario%20Nutrition%20Standards%20for%20Schools/Healthy%20Food%20for%20Healthy%20Schools%20Protocol%202011.pdf)

### Alberta Education Act pulled from Fall 2011 Legislative Session

After a preliminary stakeholder consultation, Education Minister Thomas Lukaszuk has decided not to go forward with Bill 18, the Education Act, in the current Fall Legislative Session. Further public and stakeholder engagement will take place over the next few months to ensure the legislation reflects the Government of Alberta's renewed commitment to education.

The Education Act is part of the ongoing transformation of Alberta's education system. For more information on the proposed Education Act, visit: <http://education.alberta.ca/departement/policy/education-act.aspx>

### Blended Learning at Holy Name Catholic Elementary School

The intermediate students at Holy Name Catholic Elementary School, under the guidance of principal Antonio Cardamone and teachers Cathryn Hay and Luana Martinelli, are experiencing great success from their involvement in the "Blended Learning" pilot. This initiative, created by the Ministry of Education and partnered by Niagara Catholic District School Board, was created to adapt students' learning styles in the classroom while utilizing 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology. It is a combination that blends in-class teacher instruction with online learning, using Web-based learning tools, creating an authentic connection between teaching and technology.

Blended Learning has provided Holy Name's intermediate teachers and students with a vital tool to successfully incorporate technology into learning and to enhance program delivery. The combination of effective teaching strategies, blended learning tools and the engaged student body, ultimately creates a dynamic learning environment. The blended learning classroom, provides innovative ways for students to communicate and collaborate through the use of the Learning Management System tools, such as the Discussion Board and Blogs, which helps increase student learning.

When completing an activity with an online component, the students are fully and actively engaged. Many of the online assignments are interactive and include graphics, text, audio and virtual hands-on activities, which appeal to a variety of learning styles.

A blended classroom offers varied opportunities for students to develop their critical thinking skills by allowing them to communicate, question and challenge each other's ideas more often and more effectively. Students who were previously disengaged are now more focused and are contributing thoughtful and reflective responses to assignments and discussion postings.

### Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Education announced

In October 2011 The Honourable Peter Van Loan, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, on behalf of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, announced the recipients of the 2010–11 Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education. Award recipients were honoured at a ceremony in Ottawa, Ontario, fittingly held on World Teachers' Day. The event also marked the launch of the nomination process for the 2011-12 Prime Minister's Awards. "Great teachers inspire great minds to be their best," said Minister Van Loan, at the event. "Today, we celebrate outstanding educators who are igniting the curiosity of their students and making Canada a better place, one child at a time."

This year, 84 Prime Minister's Awards were presented to teachers and early childhood educators, either individually or to teams, from across Canada.

A full list of winners can be found at: [www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/pmte-ppmee.nsf/eng/wz01822.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/pmte-ppmee.nsf/eng/wz01822.html)

### Successful Northern Student Teacher Bursary extended

A two-year financial support pilot program designed to encourage student teachers to seek jobs in northern Alberta schools is being hailed as a success and has been extended. The Northern Student Teacher Bursary is funded by the Alberta government and administered by the Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC).

The initiative is designed to attract students in a post-secondary teacher-preparation program to northern Alberta communities by providing scholarships of \$16,000 (\$8,000 in each of the last two years of their studies.) Successful applicants must live and work in the north for three years after graduating.

Practicum funding is also available to bursary recipients to a maximum of \$2,000 (\$1,000 per year) to help offset increased costs of travelling and living in the north.

For more information: [www.benorth.ca](http://www.benorth.ca)



### Two Dufferin-Peel Catholic schools shortlisted for Award for Excellence in Education

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is proud to announce that two of its schools, Our Lady of Good Voyage Catholic Elementary School and Sts. Martha & Mary Catholic Elementary School, were recognized as Schools of Distinction at the annual Awards for Excellence in Education celebration in November 2011, in Toronto.

Based on analysis of data from The Fraser Institute's Report Card on Ontario's Elementary Schools, up to 30 schools across Ontario are shortlisted in each of the award categories: Improvement in Academics, Excellence in Language Arts, and Excellence in Mathematics.

"I'd like to congratulate the staff, students, parent, and entire school communities of Our Lady of Good Voyage and Sts. Martha & Mary," says John Kostoff, director of education. "This recognition exemplifies our board's commitment to student success and is a celebration of the dedication and hard work of these school teams."

### EXL Nominations due in spring

CASA members who have exhibited exemplary leadership ability and who have enhanced school administration are eligible to receive this award, which includes an honorary life membership in CASA. Nominations must be received between October 1, 2011 and May 16, 2012. Application forms can be downloaded at: [www.casa-acas.ca/downloads/EXL%20Nomination%20Pkg.pdf](http://www.casa-acas.ca/downloads/EXL%20Nomination%20Pkg.pdf)

### Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board to lead children's mental health project

The Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board was selected in November 2011 by the Ontario Ministry of Education to lead a pilot project that will enhance mental health services currently offered to children in schools. The board is one of 15 boards in the province selected by the Ministry to take part in the Children and Youth Mental Health Project. The board will collaborate with community mental health agencies to ensure that children and families receive comprehensive services.

"We know there is a great need to address mental health issues for all students," says Brian Beal, Director of Education for the board. "According to Children's Mental Health Ontario, the stark reality is that one in five children has mental health issues, so we are very pleased to have been selected to lead one of the Children and Youth Mental Health Projects."

The board provides education to over 21,000 students in 53 schools in Simcoe County and the Districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound.



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*Clint Monaghan, Teacher  
Jean Vanier Intermediate Catholic School  
Ottawa*

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# World's Finest Chocolate

## **Banning Chocolate Fundraising Will Not Fight Childhood Obesity**

There are school boards that believe eliminating chocolate fundraising will reduce the obesity rate of their students. The truth is that chocolate fundraising takes place away from school, and are permitted by Provincial Ministries of Health & Education.

Polls have proven that not only is the chocolate consumed primarily (77%)<sup>1</sup> by adults, but 90%<sup>1</sup> of parents believe that parents, not school boards, should be responsible for deciding whether their children participate in chocolate fundraising campaigns.

## **Banning chocolate fundraising could reduce the funds available that are used to purchase equipment and pay for field trips, initiatives which teach children the skills to live a healthy and active lifestyle.**

World's Finest Chocolate has been a proven fundraising winner for schools for over 50 years! It has partnered with Canadian schools, athletic groups and social clubs since 1958.

## **Is a once or twice per year chocolate fundraising campaign part of the reason some of our children are obese? **No****

## **Is fundraising with chocolate contrary to school board efforts to teach children about healthy eating and living active lifestyles? **No****

### **Consider the facts about chocolate fundraising that you may not be aware of:**

- Chocolate comes from a fruit tree and is made from a seed. Scientific research suggests it delivers important health benefits and is rich in antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamins and minerals
- There is NO correlation between chocolate and obesity<sup>2</sup> and research states it may be a viable instrument in the prevention of heart disease<sup>3</sup>
- A study reported in the British Medical Journal, involving more than 114,000 people, showed that higher levels of chocolate consumption was significantly associated with a reduced risk of cardiometabolic disorders. This beneficial association was significant for cardiovascular disease (37% reduction), diabetes (31%) and stroke (29%)<sup>3</sup>

### **Common sense and behavioural science support occasional treats in a healthy diet**

- 92% of Registered Dietitians (RD) say people maintain a balanced lifestyle when they don't deprive themselves of treats<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly three quarters of RDs (72.9%) agree that milk chocolate can be part of a healthy diet<sup>4</sup>

### **What do parents say?**

- 91% of adults surveyed agree that teaching children where treats fit into a healthy lifestyle is better than banning chocolate for fundraising<sup>1</sup>
- 97% of adults say it is APPROPRIATE to sell chocolate to fundraise<sup>1</sup>

## **Chocolate Fundraising Is Not The Problem**

It is a good opportunity to reinforce the nutritional information that schools are teaching about the importance of balanced food choices. But most importantly, it can also be part of the solution through the many programs it helps fund.



Source: 1: September 2010 Ipsos Reid poll of 1,500+ adults (including 500 parents of children aged 4-13).

2: "Patterns of chocolate consumption", 1994.

3: "British Medical Journal", chocolate consumption and cardiometabolic disorders, 7 studies, involving 114,000 people, studies up to Oct. 2010.

4: Chocolate's Role in a Balanced Lifestyle - Survey of Nutritional Professionals: an online survey of 450 registered dietitians (RD) by the Honey Centre for Health & Nutrition.

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