

Summer 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

Part 2



Innovative and New all-in-one IR Wireless Classroom Solution by TOA



System Comparison: Conventional Competitor System vs. The New Innovative IR Wireless System by TOA

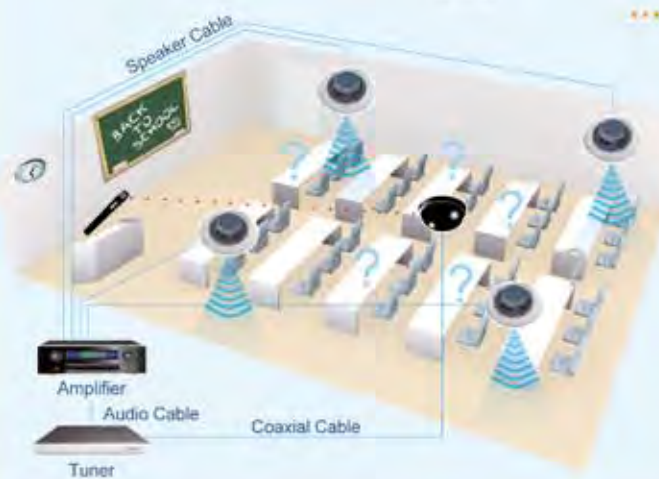
Conventional

Complex
and
troublesome

Configuration **Speaker x 4**
Receiver x 1
IR wireless tuner x 1
Amplifier x 1
IR wireless microphone x 1

Wiring **Speaker cable x 4**
Coaxial cable x 1
Audio cable x 1

Performance *Uneven sound quality.
Installation time is longer
because there are four
speakers and extra
wiring.*

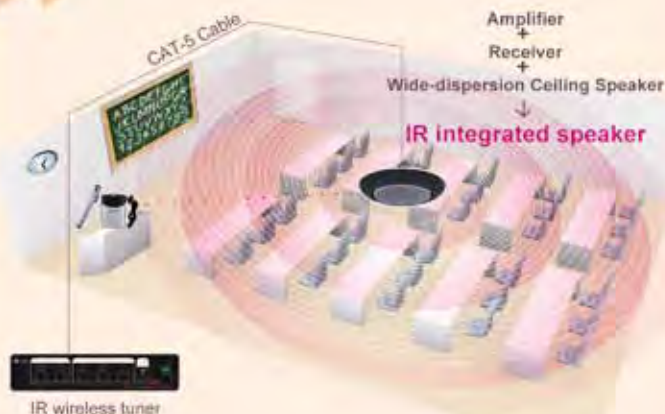


Simple
and easy

Configuration **IR integrated speaker x 1**
IR wireless tuner x 1
IR wireless microphone x 1

Wiring **CAT-5 (STP) x 1**

Performance *Uniform sound quality
throughout the classroom
through one speaker.
Quick and easy installation
using one CAT-5 cable.*



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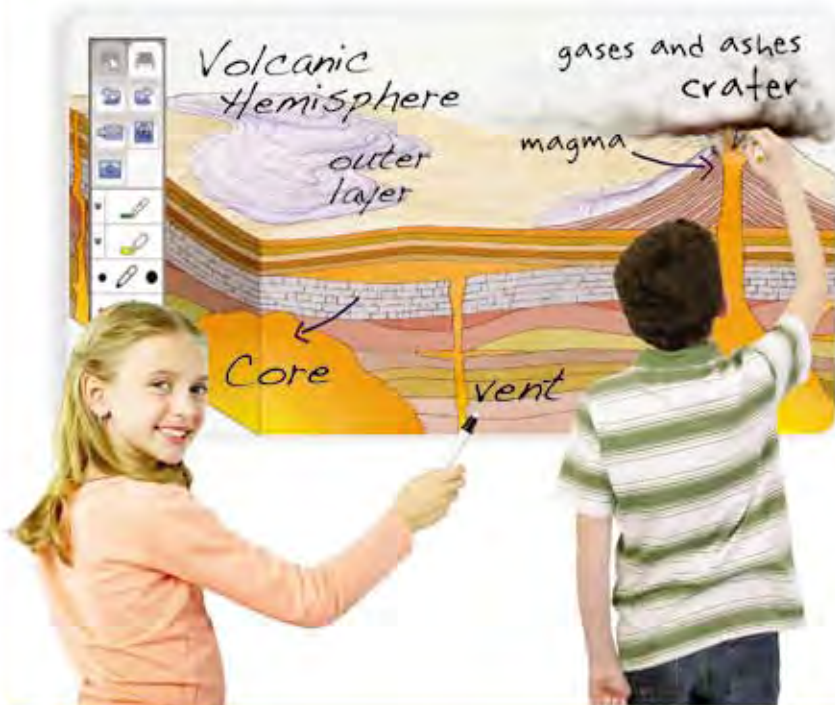
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Tapping into tap water again

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Canadians drink more bottled water than coffee, tea, apple juice or milk. In fact, Canadians consume an average of 60 liters of bottled water per person per year. That's a whopping 2 billion liters annually.

While many Canadian cities, including Charlottetown, P.E.I., Nelson, BC and London, ON, have banned the sale of water bottles on some level, 88 percent of Canada's plastic water bottles don't get recycled. Instead they end up in landfills or going to incineration.

The fact is plastic bottles are among the fastest-growing form of municipal solid waste in Canada. Yet, in spite of the staggering environmental impact, bottled water has become such an ingrained part of our lifestyle that we sometimes forget there's an alternative.

Its name? Tap water.

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Plus, tap water is cost-effective and environmentally friendly. And now drinking water companies like OASIS International[®], have made tap water more convenient and accessible, thanks to bottle filling stations that let water drinkers refill their own water bottles.

The OASIS VersaFiller[®] quickly and easily turns various drinking fountains into eco-friendly bottle fillers," says OASIS regional sales manager Chris Romagnoli. "Nobody likes filling a water bottle in the lavatory sink, it's awkward, and the bottle never gets completely filled. With the VersaFiller, students, faculty and staff can easily refill their own reusable water bottles."

Besides being highly convenient, VersaFiller stations are helping school campuses "go green." Many North American colleges and universities including Pepperdine, Michigan State and Marshall University in the U.S. have transformed ordinary drinking fountains into eco-friendly bottle filling stations with the VersaFiller.

Reducing plastic waste across campus

Margie Phillips, Marshall University's sustainability manager, says VersaFiller bottle filling stations were key to helping the University reduce plastic consumption across campus.



"Our students loved their bottled water," says Phillips, "so we did a reusable bottle giveaway (to encourage the switch). Now they love the stations because they can easily fill the bottles, and it doesn't cost them any money. We plan to install one station for every single floor in every building across campus."

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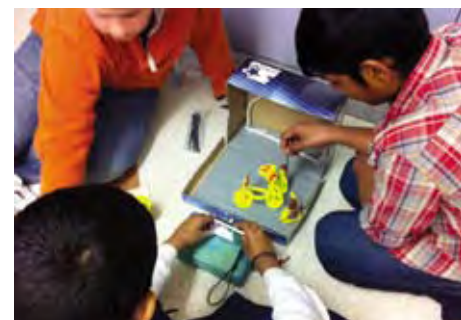
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The A-B-C's of Creativity and Innovation on Education

“Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.”
- Theodore Levitt

Welcome to the Summer 2012 issue of *Leaders and Learners*, the official magazine of the Canadian Association of School Administrators (CASA). On behalf of the 2011-2012 CASA/ACAS Executives and Frank Kelly, Executive Director, I would like to express appreciation to all contributors to this summer issue. One of the strengths of CASA as an organization is the continued sharing of creative and innovative best practices happening in our school districts across Canada.

This Summer 2012 issue highlights “Creativity and Innovation in Education.” In his research George Land revealed that human beings are naturally creative beginning at birth, but as humans grow and develop, they learn to be uncreative. The study emphasized that learning to be creative, continuing to be creative and living a creative life should be compared to learning how to play a sport. The same skills that are required to learn how to play a sport apply to learning how to live a creative life throughout a lifetime of lifelong learning.

As school administrators, we are aware that the A-B-C's in education are constantly changing, similarly to the many changes that occur in our schools and daily lives. Every day our students generate creative and innovative ways of learning by using apps, blogs and clouds in their learning, which I refer to as the new “A-B-C's” of education, to enhance their understanding about their world inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, research has shown that the average adult may develop three to six possible ideas for any situation, whereas a child may create 60 different possibilities to any given problem. Therefore, our classrooms are filled with creative individuals who are eager and willing to learn, create and innovate in their learning.

However, as leaders in Canadian education, we are sometimes challenged about how to incorporate these creative and innovative ideas to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. Research assists us by recognizing that excellence in any area can be achieved by creating opportunities, by providing encouragement and training, by coaching and practice, and even more practice. Mozart, a musical child prodigy, trained as a composer and pianist for 16 years before his work as a musician was accepted for public performance. Can we imagine how many Mozarts are sitting in our Canadian classrooms awaiting opportunities, encouragement, training, coaching and practice, along with our creative leadership to develop their creative talents?

The articles in this Summer 2012 issue acknowledge that a balance in educational practices is essential to continue to ensure the success of all Canadian students. The educational issues of early school leavers, bullying, mental health and effective parent engagement continue to challenge all Canadian administrators. Nevertheless, we continue to emphasize individualized learning, alternative schools, and literacy and numeracy programs, as well as endeavoring to implement creativity and innovation in our Canadian school districts, for the benefit of all students.

In closing, it has been an honour to serve as the President of CASA for the past two years. It has been an excellent professional development opportunity to work with all members of CASA, the CASA/ACAS Executives and Frank Kelly. I would like to express my appreciation for the support from the CASA membership received during my term as President, and offer my sincere congratulations to Roger Nippard, President-Elect of CASA.

Thank you for your continued support of CASA. Enjoy the Summer Conference 2012 discussing, networking and learning about creative and innovative practices in Canadian education for now and in the future.



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CASA/ACAS President

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Leaders & Learners: A Forum for Sharing Best Practices and Innovative Ideas

The winter 2012 edition of this magazine featured education projects that were creative and innovative. In that edition, we appealed for articles from across Canada for this June edition, and we have had a wonderful response! Teachers and administrators have been eager to submit their work outlining projects built to inspire student success.

The articles in this magazine represent educators in several Canadian provinces from Alberta to New Brunswick. They deal with advances in technology, alternative approaches to engaging students, reaching out beyond the classroom, ensuring student safety, commitment through the arts, communicating with parents, remedial assistance that works, better use of school facilities, and new ways of providing professional development and teacher training. There are so many good ideas here to apply in your own classroom or in your own school district.

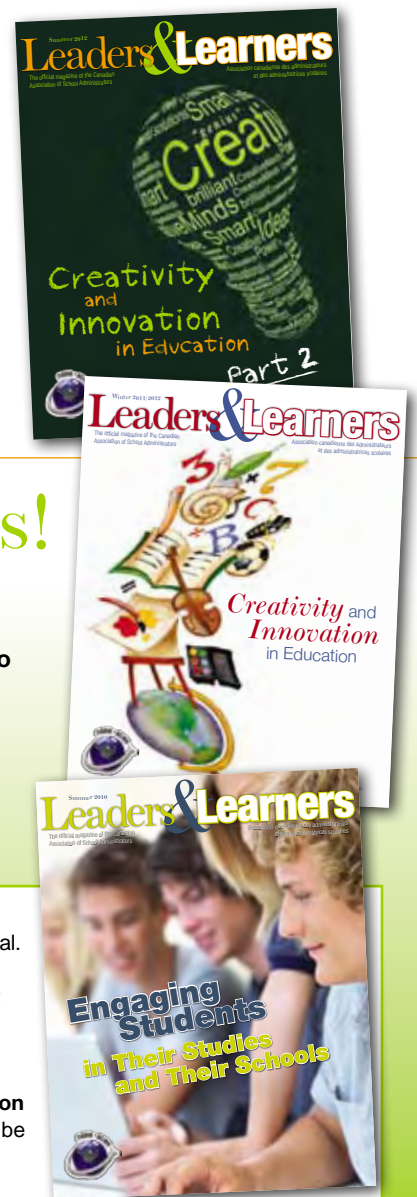
The Canadian Association of School Administrators (CASA) is proud to provide this media for sharing innovation. What we do best is to network educators and allow them to learn from each other. This is the most significant purpose of a modest national organization. We will continue with this theme as it has proven to be of interest to our members. It provides a regular update of what is developing and useful.

This new edition of *Leaders & Learners* will be available at the CASA Annual Conference in Whistler, British Columbia, July 5-8. At the same time, it will be distributed to all school districts and senior administrators across Canada.

Again, I encourage you to submit your best practices and most innovative procedures to *Leaders & Learners*. It is through your contributions that we can help improve student engagement and student success.



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 Winter 2012/2013 issue of Leaders&Learners.

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

THEME Dimensions of Leadership

- » Proposals are due June 29, 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 October 29, 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).



Taking the Classroom into the Community

By Karen Branscombe

When the ice and snow of a winter storm force the cancellation of classes, most students rejoice at the unexpected holiday. However, there is one group of teenagers who want to go to school because their classrooms are now corporate boardrooms and warehouse workrooms. These young adults are part of a unique School to Work Transition Program, an effort designed to give students a different approach to learning and success in school. Since the program was created and implemented six years ago, School District 2 in New Brunswick has seen its dropout rate decline to below 2 per cent and graduation rates now exceed 90 per cent.

From four students the first year to 175 students in 2011-2012, this program has brought the community to the classroom and hope to many young adults who needed a second chance. The words of a 2011 graduate of the program say it all: “Ten months ago, I was a pregnant teenage dropout and now I am a teenage mother with a high school diploma going on to a community college. Once I went back to school, everything seemed to fall in to place. Teachers gave me a clean slate and my background didn’t matter.”

At each of the eight high schools in the district, guidance counselors, teachers and administrators identify students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school. The students are 17 years old or older and there must be a fit between what credits they have and what they could complete within the program. The students have two years to complete the program.

Once identified, a team works diligently to create the best learning opportunity for the students.

Staff of the School to Work Transition Program have developed relationships with over 250 businesses in the community. Each work placement is personally selected to meet the needs of the students. Once the selection is made, the students begin working on site for the employer. They do not receive financial

compensation and they must report to work four days a week. The fifth day is spent in class completing credits for graduation. This classroom environment is the critical piece to the success of the program.

The classrooms are found in boardrooms, warehouse workrooms, community centers and vacant store fronts. Teachers travel to the students on site or near their worksite to meet with them in their *learning pods*. On any given day, a group of students gathers at their learning pod to work on their independent learning contract. It is their responsibility to finish their credits. They have the support of the safety net that has been created for them; the teacher and the business partner and any support services that they need. For some students, this net has to be very large and for others it can be quite small. This depends largely on how



The 2011 School to Work Transition Program graduating class.

much support the student has from family. Rising to the challenge of filling this gap for many students, the business community has recognized the value of connecting with these young adults.

The first business partner was a window manufacturing company in a small rural town. Four students were placed there and from this, a model for the program was developed. Building trust and credibility with the business partners has developed over time. They now describe the program as win/win. In some cases, the employer has the opportunity to offer work to the student following graduation. However, as one employer noted, the most important benefit is one of “participating in the development of our younger adults. As a community leader, I feel that I have much to offer and much to give back. Many of the students that I meet have not had the rewarding experiences that I grew up with. I need to show my support and do what I can to provide opportunities to students who need them.”

In the eyes of the student, these new adults in their lives give them confidence. In an early class, teachers recall one student who had had nine jobs and had been living on his own. He was 17 years old when he was referred to them. He often spoke of how he couldn't find any adults who would believe in him. Since graduating from this program, he has continued to work for the same company that he did his work placement with several years ago.

Another student described his personal responsibilities at home included working two jobs while going to high school. He dropped out because he couldn't stay awake in class. His work placement was at a plant that expected him to work positively and manage his time efficiently. He knew that he had to be on time and be responsible. As he recalls, it forced him to prioritize and this became the priority. He has since become a manager of a small business.

The unsung heroes of this program are the two teachers who work with the students. With limited budget and resources, they have carved individualized learning plans for students. By knocking on doors of the business community, they have fostered caring relationships for our students. Through their efforts, the community understands that educators are trying to do the right thing. A shifting attitude about the students is evident. And, a focus on giving back to the community and being a good citizen is modeled between employer and student. At the workplace, students are expected to be honest, respectful and accept responsibility. Employers

are not able to tolerate less than this and students know that this opportunity will not continue if they do not follow through with their commitment.

In Peter Block's book, *Community*, he reminds us that: “The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity and gifts, rather than one of problem solving, fear and retribution. Communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness.”

Having the conversations and building the relationships around student needs is the foundation of this program. The educators have

been called upon to think differently about learning. And thankfully, the community has responded. ○

Karen Branscombe has been Superintendent of School District 2 in New Brunswick for nine years. Her work in education for the past 30 years has included being a classroom teacher, vice principal and principal. Karen Branscombe shares her expertise as an education associate working with Solution Tree, and she has been honored as one of Canada's 100 Most Powerful Women in 2010 and 2011 by the Women's Executive Network.



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The Paperless Classroom



By Paul Hatala and Judy Langsner

The average textbook weighs 3.5 lbs. Add three more textbooks, plus binders for each course, and you start to understand why students don't always bring their books to class (or take them home for homework).

To reduce the weight—and the photocopying being done—I looked for a solution:

I could upload something to a website but how do students access the content in the classroom when I need it? I could ask them to print things from home but then all I'm doing is offloading the cost to the student. I needed something portable, that the student brought with them to class. The question became, "which device?" Being a science teacher, there was only one thing to do: perform an experiment.

With the support of my principal, I did a cross-comparison study with a Grade 9 science class between three devices; an iPod touch, a netbook and an iPad. Students used these devices on a rotating basis to read and annotate

their textbook (something they can never do with a paper book), access the internet and view worksheets, tests and quizzes. At the end of the study, the iPad was the clear winner. From there, we decided to try this with a class set.

A very supportive principal and open-minded senior Board administration allowed us to purchase a class set of iPads. The school purchased the class set specifically for the Biotech program (an interdisciplinary course). Every student had a device, access to their textbook and wireless access to the internet. We used an "ownership" model where students kept the device for the semester, were allowed to load their own content and apps and took responsibility for any damage or loss. Parents provided signed permission agreeing to take responsibility in the event of any loss or damage.

I was amazed by the power such a device could have on my classroom. My students became responsible for finding answers rather than relying on me. "Google it and get back to me" became a common phrase in my class. By the end of the semester, the students would answer each other with this phrase. They were becoming independent learners and I became the facilitator helping them navigate the information, teaching them to sift through the content and ensuring they understood the material. When discussing an aspect of science as it relates to society, students would find information quickly to participate in the discussion. If someone raised a question that no one knew the answer to, students instantly went online and found a reference.

I began teaching my students how to use a textbook more effectively. Using GoodReader, students could highlight, annotate and make notes right in their textbook. When studying, they could jump to specific spots they highlighted—something unique to iPads. There were no forgotten books or worksheets because everything was on the device. Using Dropbox,



Apps that Were Used

- Flashcard* (Free)
- Molecules (Free)
- Pages (\$9.99)
- iMovie (\$4.99)
- EMD PTE (free)
- Prezi Viewer (free)
- Dropbox (free)
- IdeaSketch (free)
- Notes Plus (\$7.99)
- GoodReader (\$4.99)
- Lino (free)
- Skitch (free)
- Evernote (free)
- StoMo (free)
- ShowMe (free)

students could even access all this information over the web if they forgot (or didn't charge) their iPad.

Since GoodReader has the ability to write using your finger (or a stylus), students were able to take notes on PowerPoints from a more Socratic lesson. They could watch YouTube videos of content and they could refer back to the video at a later time. The instant access, always-on device meant that when I walked into the cafeteria during their spare, I often saw them reviewing the last lesson, adding to their notes or watching a video that we had seen in class (although when I remove the rose-coloured glasses, I do acknowledge they were sometimes playing Angry Birds for a break from studying!).

I often use my students as "atoms" when demonstrating concepts in chemistry. Using their iPads, students could record these interactive moments and review them when studying. Turning the learning over to them, I asked the students to create their own movies to demonstrate their learning and we found StoMo (stop motion animation). My students quickly took to this App and were soon creating videos of many concepts (including DNA replication, endocytosis

and protein synthesis). This was a great tool for making sure they understood the material and they would often remark how much better they understood something when they created a video of it. This became a staple classroom resource.

ShowMe (free) allows students to record their voice while writing on a whiteboard on the iPad. These videos can then be uploaded to a website and shared with the class. This tool became an excellent assessment strategy where the students could provide feedback. No longer was I relying simply on the written word; I had the students explaining things as they wrote.

There are a number of benefits iPads have over other devices. With no physical keyboard to unfold, they are easier to use anytime, anywhere. No spinning hard drive or keyboard means less breakage and wear and tear from use. Instant-on means that during class, I don't have to wait for devices to boot up. Battery life is incredible with students rarely needing to recharge during the day. Apps are very affordable. Since the device is touch-sensitive, students can write directly on the device, which is often quicker than typing. Most of all, the device is intuitive.

This device has truly revolutionized my classroom. I photocopy less, have changed the way I teach students to make them more active learners and now teach them skills as opposed to simply content. While it is true there is a large up-front investment (\$589 per device), the return on this investment is equally large. Textbooks aren't lost or damaged. Photocopying costs can be minimized. Software costs can be reduced significantly. The devices can be "reused" by other students.

We used the devices daily for more than what was outlined here. While no device can substitute for good teaching practice, this device along with good teaching practice can change the teaching and learning environment.

In case you were wondering, I wrote this article on my iPad sitting in a coffee shop. ○

Paul Hatala, Head of Science at Ancaster High School, Hamilton-Wentworth DSB is an innovative, creative educator who is always looking for better ways to engage his students.

Judy Langsner, Principal of Ancaster High School, Hamilton-Wentworth DSB, is a strong supporter of technology and teacher innovation in support of improving student achievement.

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So, Where did you go to School Today?

By Terry Freeman

Parents often ask their children, “What did you do at school today?” Instead, because of the concept of Community Classrooms, some parents in Medicine Hat, Alberta are asking, “Where did you go to school today?”

The Open Minds Education Concept (OMEC) is a curriculum-based experience that moves the classroom into a venue within the community for an entire week. The experience is a spark for related learning activities that occur throughout the year. Classroom teachers work closely with facility coordinators to design learning experiences that meet student and curricular needs. The week long nature of the program provides the opportunity to immerse oneself in the facility, promotes deep reflection and produces high-level thinking through activities and the learning process.

The opportunity to learn with and in a specific community facility enhances the notion that subject areas are connected, related and highly integrated. This notion of contextual learning is referred to as “Relational Understanding” and encourages students to apply prior knowledge, new experiences and subject “rules”, not only to the real world but also in it.

Historically, school education and personal experience have been not only separate, but often parallel learning environments, intersecting only when experience is deemed relevant to the curriculum at hand. Exposing students to opportunities within a community creates a greater relational understanding, which encourages students to see the whole picture. This “view” allows student to see connections with the learning. The context of

the facility, and its relationship to that community, is strengthened.

As teachers, we dedicate large amounts of time encouraging our students to learn “rules”. This is instrumental learning or the learning of rules. But what have we done? Where is the wonder in learning? Where is the opportunity to immerse oneself in the surroundings and truly reflect on what has been learned?

The Open Minds Education Concept provides that opportunity. Facilities and their coordinators are open to classrooms of children occupying their sites for weeks at a time. Coordinators like Ron Mason, from the Historic Clay District in Medicine Hat, work closely with classroom teachers in ensuring that the week-long visit to the site is meaningful, deep and full of wonder. For the site, “it is an excellent utilization of resources and programs.”

Imagine 24 students, a week’s worth of activities and on-going site construction. Perhaps one should “wonder” what that would be like? Teachers Dalyce Harrison and Glenda Groom, along with Mason, did just that. Was the on-going construction an impediment to learning or a learning opportunity? These three, their students and the parent volunteers embraced it. Prior to the site visit, the teachers and coordinator worked with students on developing “habits of mind”. These visits are to help classroom groups develop the “habits of mind” that include observation skills, journaling strategies and critical thinking, all of which are the cornerstones of the Open Minds philosophy. The ability to focus, forge a meaningful relationship with the environment and to reflect upon what was learned, are the goals.



A Grade 4 student's in depth journal entry, completed while visiting the museum at the museum the Historic Clay District.



Students reflecting at the Esplanade.

A brisk, bright morning saw the students of Mrs. Harrison spread around the Historic Clay District in Medicine Hat. A group of girls were engaged in an archaeological dig. Working alongside of them was the originator of the Open Minds concept, Gillian Kydd. It is in Kydd's Doctoral Thesis that she mentions the importance of "time". Time is crucial for immersion in the facility. Time is important for developing critical thinking. And, time is important for deep, personal reflection.

Immersion in the site, critical thinking and deep personal reflection were evidenced in the journal of one of the Grade 4 students. After spending an activity session in the museum section of the Historic Clay District during a cement pour, one student reflected upon the action. The detailed journal entry demonstrates the depth of engagement. The student states this, "helped me to be better at drawing because I got to take my time and I got to add details that I usually would not get to at school."

Student journaling and diagramming are essential elements of the site immersion. Having had access to the ceramic room in the Historic Clay District one student mused, "Why are they called crock pots?" Another offered, "Why does this crock pot not have a handle?" The extended time for students to reflect upon their learning is often prompted by this guiding principle of Kydd's, and the approach, "I wonder what you will wonder about tomorrow?"

Renee Dowling was the first teacher in Medicine Hat to brave the Open Minds concept. She and her Grade 2 students spent a week at Police Point Park, an urban park in the city. Dowling felt the experience was an anchor for her class. It was constantly referenced throughout the year. Making relational connections between the park, the city and content became the norm for the students. A walk to the skating rink later in the year could become a learning opportunity connected to things learned at Police Point Park.

There are many more steps educators in Medicine Hat need to take, to fully realize OMEC. A onetime Medicine Hat School District No. 76 grant has offered schools the opportunity to access the existing facilities. In addition to the Historic Clay District, there are the Esplanade Museum and Art Gallery, History in the Hills First Nations Metis Inuit Interpretive Program, and Police

Point Interpretive Park that have embraced the opportunity to share with students.

Medicine Hat College also opened its facility to a group of Grade 6 students who were under the direction of a local drama instructor. They spent the week doing math, science, social studies and language arts in the college theatre and gymnasium. The end product was a Greek drama. City Hall and the Medicine Hat Musical Theatre Play House have also offered to participate in this endeavour.

The combined efforts of site coordinators, teachers and parent volunteers bring these buildings and parks alive to the

students. More importantly, programs like this begin to allow students to generate understandings of how places in their community relate to each other and them, as students and future contributing members of that community. One wonders what education for students would be like if they could slow down, problem solve, critically think, work together, reflect and understand the complexities of their community. ○

Terry Freeman is a Director of Programs and Instruction for Medicine Hat School District 76.

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David (back left) and Ryan (back right) with students.



The class showing off all their mobile devices.



Why Put Your Head in the Cloud?

By Ryan Ewaskiw

“I [had] a dream, that all students and staff would be provided an individual laptop, or a netbook, maybe even some kind of wireless tablet device...”

But wait...that dream is simply not going to be a reality in the majority of our school boards anytime soon. With current funding cuts and technical issues involving access to electrical wiring and other infrastructure shortcomings, simply stated the 1:1 ratio of student-to-computer device is not scalable in public education at this time.

However, from a pedagogical point of view, many researchers like Sugata Mitra suggest 1:1 is a direction we need not worry much about embracing; multiple students collaborating with the support of a shared computer is a much better teaching and learning strategy. Furthermore, student “learning skills” such as organization, collaboration and self-regulation, become paramount as they work to solve problems and complete inquiry-based learning assessment tasks that “are carefully planned to relate to the curriculum expectations and learning goals and, as much as possible, to the interests, learning styles and preferences, needs and experiences of all students.” (Growing Success, 2010, p.6)

So, why then put your head in the cloud? In my role as Learning Technologies Coordinator, I have visited hundreds of classrooms during the past few years. In an article that was co-written with David Carruthers, I concluded my portion of the piece with three observations of how learning technology tools might be integrated in a well-balanced classroom.

Connecting With Cloud-Based Classrooms

By David Carruthers

“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.”

- Simon Sinek

On April 20th, the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) Director, Bill Tucker, addressed a staff of 8,000 via videocast as he asked each of us to consider “Why?”—why do we do what we do. Tucker articulated that we need to reach “each student, every day” to prepare them for tomorrow. This will require that teachers be willing to take risks and step outside of their comfort zones. It will require innovative, relevant learning opportunities in a technologically-rich environment that fosters creativity, problem solving and interdependence. This is the skill set that we must impart on our students to prepare them for tomorrow. However, even for the best-intentioned teacher, technological barriers exist that may obstruct this vision from becoming a reality.

Like Tucker though, I believe that it is not only imperative but possible to dismantle barriers and empower each student, every day, to reach their full potential and prepare them for tomorrow. From my experience, once some of these barriers have been removed and the potential of free, cloud-based applications has been tapped, the rest happens almost organically. Following is my example.

Web-based programs and cloud computing are not new to the classroom. However, with the exception of a tweet here and there, or a quick blog post, I’ve never felt the need to write about their use in my classroom. Over the past few months though, I have experienced several moments where I’ve had to stand back and take notice of what was beginning to transpire in my “cloud-based” classroom.

1. A large screen display connected to a powerful desktop or laptop computer is a great tool for activities such as whole-class shared reading and mathematics lessons.
2. Workspaces with a few SOLE centres (a large-screen monitor connected to a computer, laptop or netbook) are well suited for small collaborative inquiry investigations. (Mitra, S. 2010)
3. Wi-fi connectivity for students' personal mobile devices is the final way to engage students by giving them access to personal learning tools at any time and in any place.

It is the third point where many school boards are now directing much of their attention, with respect to system goals in terms of financial planning and implementing professional development for teaching strategies that leverage wireless cloud networks. In the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), the most commonly indicated priority from the feedback received from students as well as all of our stakeholders was the desire to deploy wireless access in all schools and locations. This increased wireless access in schools and worksites is a step toward the "anytime, anywhere access" that has been identified as a current technology trend and desire to support each student in the TVDSB every day. ○

Ryan Ewaskiw (OCT, Med) has been the Learning Technologies Coordinator for Thames Valley District School Board for four and a half years, and has been an educator for 15 years. He can be reached by Twitter: @ryanewaskiw; by email, r.ewaskiw@tvdsb.on.ca or via his webpage, www.tvdsb.ca/ryan.

For a full list of references, email ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.

It's no secret that cloud-based tools such as Google Docs are quintessential to my programming. A keyboard and screen is like a pencil and paper—but this is where the analogy ends. Little by little, and under their own volition, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that my students are taking the collaborative aspects of these tools to new levels. I now have students informing me that they will be absent from school but requesting to be part of the classroom discussion via Skype. On several occasions, I am amazed when it is brought to my attention that a student is collaborating with an absent peer. I don't ask them to connect, they just do.

Earlier this year, two students, one of which was 2,000 kilometres away in Florida, decided to use the collaborative tools embedded in the cloud-based application Prezi to work on a history project. My students didn't have these skills in September.

Beyond channelling new collaborative opportunities for my students, cloud computing has provided my students with opportunities for growth in areas that are prerequisites for future employment. As one of my students states, cloud computing can help "develop collaboration and teamwork which can be more important than an 'A' on your report card."

By harnessing the anytime, anywhere, any platform nature of cloud-based applications, barriers are being overcome and each student, every day is gradually developing the skill set that will prepare them for tomorrow. ○

David Carruthers (OCT, Classroom Teacher) is a Grade 7 teacher at Mitchell Hepburn Public School in the Thames Valley District School Board. He can be reached by Twitter: @pluggedportable; by email, d.carruthers@tvdsb.on.ca or via his blog: <http://thepluggedinportable.edublogs.org>.

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Creative Construction to Enhance Learning

By Ken Klassen

It is often noted that if someone from an earlier age would travel through time to a modern school, they would still immediately recognize it as a school. School buildings were and are built to house learning, however, not necessarily to enhance it. With a recent emphasis on authentic and engaging learning, many educators are now advocating “learning beyond the walls” of the school building itself.

Rapid growth in Hanover, along with the urgent need to move students from portable classroom villages into permanent space, could have favoured practicality and expedience over imagination. Instead, we determined that our foundational decisions should ensure that the new school would support a flourishing “lifeworld” characterized by authentic and meaningful learning. In order to meet our responsibility to students, to our community and to the environment, we committed to adding complexity, time and cost to an already urgent and expensive undertaking.

From the beginning, the school division, the Public Schools Finance Board, and the architects agreed to pursue the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold standard. This involved using the Integrated Design Process (IDP), a highly collaborative process allowing as many voices

An architect's rendering of what Clearspring Middle School's "town square" might look like, viewed from the tiered seating area.



as possible to be heard. Together we identified stewardship and social responsibility as our guiding principles, with project drivers of sustainability and durability, liveability, engaging and flexible learning spaces, and a strong connection to the community.

The result will be a healthy and safe building with natural and full spectrum lighting, appropriate acoustics and low emitting materials that are regionally produced or recycled and environmentally friendly throughout their life cycle, including cleaning and maintenance. Instructional areas will be clustered to create smaller communities within the school, with guidance, resource and grooming rooms within each cluster to facilitate full inclusion of all students. Flexible learning spaces will include “street corner” alcoves in each classroom cluster

and a town square with a community grandstand (bleachers) at the entrance to the main street, which runs the length of the school.

A master landscape plan for the school site envisions a variety of outdoor learning areas that will be developed by students and staff as authentic learning tasks. Water-efficient landscaping will promote on-site storm water management, while fostering natural insect and bird life.

The LEED report card offers an innovation credit for designing the school itself to be a learning tool. Hanover School Division eagerly embraced this unique opportunity to create maximum learning opportunity for our students out of what might otherwise have been a distant process.

From the very beginning of the planning process, HSD welcomed a “School as a

An architect's rendering of what Clearspring Middle School might look like.



Learning Tool” teacher co-ordinator to join the divisional team. This co-ordinator was present at all Integrated Design sessions, allowing him to provide valuable input to the architects at every stage of the design, as well as to take away ideas for learning which could be used by teachers and students. A “Schools of the Future” website was created and linked to our divisional home page to share the entire process with our students and teachers, and, for that matter, with anyone in the world.

The architecture team led focus sessions that provided opportunities for divisional principal and teacher representatives to have direct input into the planning process. A community forum gave members of the public an opportunity to hear about and view details of the project, as well as to dialogue with divisional staff and the design team. A unique consultation session with student representatives involved spending an afternoon designing their own school in multi-grade teams, putting together true-to-scale cutouts of all the spaces in the school. Then they placed their school on a site plan laid out on the floor and presented their design to the project architect.

And when the school opens its doors in September 2012, the school building itself will become a valuable learning tool. Mechanical and electrical systems will optimize energy performance, and students will have access to monitoring systems that will provide data for their authentic learning. Cutouts will allow students to observe working mechanical systems. Structures will be left exposed in strategic places and labelled for student reference. The original street grid of Steinbach, reproduced to scale, will be illustrated in the tile pattern in the main “town square” area and down each hallway or “neighbourhood street,” allowing students to do orienteering, mapping and measuring in their own building, while learning about the history and culture of their own place.

Other ideas may be implemented along the way, including signposts in the main square with directions and distances to faraway places bearing some significance to the history of settlement in the community. A transparent column could display a core sample of the soil from the actual school site, which would make a direct connection to the geological past. Learning alcoves at the end of the main street on each floor will provide natural galleries for pictures and information panels illustrating the history and culture of the local community.

The school itself will become a walking field trip destination for other division students

and will serve as a rich resource for many areas of the curriculum. In collaboration with Manitoba Education, an HSD team of middle years teachers from a variety of subject and specialty areas will be tasked with developing a curriculum or learning guide, based on the various architectural and design elements that have been purposefully integrated into the building and the site. It is hoped that this curriculum guide will provide authentic learning ideas for teachers and students in other schools within and beyond the school division.

The new school will enrich our understanding of social responsibility with a new focus on

education for sustainable development. We hope that it will contribute to a broad, overarching vision for students, teachers, support staff and all members of the school community to become responsible and active community and world citizens, and that it will serve as a model for responsible and sustainable use of resources and a commitment to healthy living.

For pictures, videos, and information on this project, see www.hsd.ca/schoolsofthefuture/index.php. ○

Ken Klassen is the Superintendent of the Hanover School Division in Manitoba.

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Anti-Bullying
From the
Heart



By Cheryl Ricco

Nestled in a small Northeastern Ontario town, Sacred Heart Catholic School (SHCS) is a school community of 163 junior and intermediate-level students that shares a common problem among many school communities in Canada: bullying. This story is our journey and how we use technology to assist in our ongoing battle with bullies; it is a story about anti-bullying from the heart.

Our journey together began in August 2011 when Sacred Heart Catholic School staff analyzed the data acquired from an online school climate survey called “Tell Them From Me (TTFM).” As we looked at the student survey results, we were shocked to see that 40 per cent of students in both the junior and intermediate levels responded that they felt they had no one at home or at school to advocate for them. Furthermore, 66 per cent of the students responded that they had been victims of moderate to severe bullying.

The correlation between advocacy and victimization was obvious. We needed to give our students a voice and allow them to believe that our school was a safe school. We needed everyone who worked with students to be aware of the school code of conduct and the expectations for student behavior; we needed all staff members to enforce consistent consequences for inappropriate behaviors, including bullying. We needed to be made accountable to our students; and so, we created a SMART goal in the “Community Culture and Caring” component of our school improvement plan for student success. Our goal: Students will communicate with SHCS staff and parents to increase the home and school advocacy rates in the TTFM survey by 20 per cent.

So, we knew what we needed to do as a staff, but we also needed parental support. We enlisted members of our Catholic School Council to establish a Safe Schools Committee. This committee provided an avenue for school and community members to work together to determine ways that we could be proactive with the bullying issue

as opposed to reactive. Our hope was that the children would now begin to see that there were adults in their lives that would advocate for them. One key issue that kept creeping into our discussions about bullying, however, was the fact that many students were afraid to report bullying. They did not want to be considered a “snitch” or a “rat”—two terms that needed to be explained to students before any anti-bullying campaign could ever be successful. What could we, as a team, do to convince students that their voices would be heard?

In researching online anti-bullying resources, a team member came across a website called Stop-A-Bully: Canada’s Anti-Bullying Reporting Program at www.stopabully.com. This program offered the staff, students and parents in our school community an opportunity to report bullying incidents online, *anonymously*. For a small fee, which included a start-up package of posters, postcards and pink Stop-A-Bully bracelets, our school community could use technology to help put an end to bullying. Each report filed

by an individual would be sent directly to the Principal with an explanation of the bullying activity, a rate scale of 1 to 10 to grade the severity of the bullying, and the names of students involved in the bullying. The program was brought to the attention of staff and the Safe Schools Committee. It was unanimous—we would try Stop-A-Bully’s online anti-bullying reporting program at Sacred Heart Catholic School. In October 2011, Sacred Heart Catholic School officially launched its school-wide anti-bullying campaign to the community during a spirit assembly; and, it was then that Stop-A-Bully was introduced to the students.

To date, Stop-A-Bully has given voice to students who generally would not report bullying for fear of social, physical, or verbal repercussions by peers. Several reports have been filed and many discussions have been had with students; some leading to suspensions, others leading to severe warnings. As the Principal, I am still amazed to see the shock on students’ faces when they have had a report filed against them by schoolmates or parents. They have a sudden realization that their actions are being monitored and documented. For less severe cases of bullying that are reported, it is this understanding of how Stop-A-Bully works within our school that has compelled some students to cease their bullying ways. For moderate to extreme cases of bullying, the reports sent to the Principal assist in the investigation of bullying incidents by students whose bullying style is less obvious and, perhaps, more subtle.

The results have been outstanding: 55 per cent of the suspensions at Sacred Heart Catholic School have been the result of bullying, or bullying-related activities, and 66 per cent of these specific types of suspension

are by repeat offenders only. Although the majority of students learn to stop bullying, our repeat offenders are our “at-risk” students. They come from a variety of economic backgrounds, and they tend not to like school. These are the students who often find themselves in the Principal’s office for a variety of reasons, and it is these children who also need advocates at Sacred Heart Catholic School.

Using the technology to assist in our anti-bullying campaign has also given us a more clear understanding of our at-risk students. In fact, the Safe Schools Team has implemented several new initiatives to give our at-risk students an opportunity to be successful: we have now implemented a Catholic youth group led by staff and parent volunteers; we have created a unique teacher-led behavioral program for junior level at-risk students; we are also in the process

of establishing a peer leadership program for our repeat offenders.

Our final step in this journey to end bullying at Sacred Heart Catholic School is to re-issue the “Tell Them From Me” online school climate survey and redefine our school improvement for student success goal based on the new set of data. Thanks to the online technology and the valiant team effort by the staff and parents of our school community, Sacred Heart Catholic School is a safe and equitable learning environment. ○

Cheryl Ricco is the Principal of Sacred Heart Catholic School in Kirkland Lake, Ontario. She received her Bachelor of Arts and her Bachelor of Education from Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario. She also received her Master of Arts with a Specialization in Women’s Studies from the University of Ottawa.



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ArtsSmarts: The Quebec Experience

“Move him a little over this way...”, says one student to his classmate. “We have to show him flying.”

By Jodene Dunleavy and Julie Hobbs

Three Grade 5 students are hunched over a shoe box backdrop on the floor of a corridor at Thorndale Elementary School in Pierrefonds, Quebec.

Two students are adjusting clay superhero figures centimetre by centimetre as another takes still-life photos for the animation they are creating.

The class is exploring the inquiry question, “do we have a responsibility to use our knowledge of science to improve our planet and universe?”, through the arts, with the help of a local artist who has shown them how to bring clay characters to life through animation, their teacher who has helped them develop their stories and respond to their inquiry question, and their student teacher who is helping them with the production.

One hundred kilometers away, at Sutton Elementary School, small groups of Grade 5 and 6 students are exploring how to tell a story about their community visually in four frames. Each group has developed a story with characters from the community. With the support of their teacher and a local visual artist, they have begun to sketch their stories. Later they will paint the stories on canvasses and present them at a community vernissage as the finale to their project.

These are typical scenes in the 27 elementary and high schools from Quebec’s English School Boards, currently participating in the ArtsSmarts Pilot Project. Stretching all the way from the Gaspé peninsula through the island of Montreal and into the Laurentians, each of the 27 projects bring together the expertise of a local artist and a classroom teacher or teachers to design and implement a creative inquiry that engages students in the arts as a catalyst for deep learning.

Quebec schools have been hosting ArtsSmarts projects since 2000, but recent years have seen a growth in participation beginning in 2009 when the Pilot Project was launched,



partially in response to teachers’ growing concerns with the challenges of teaching heterogeneous classes with a range of learning abilities and often, increased disruptive behaviours. At the same time, ArtsSmarts partnered with the English School boards to conduct a four-year research study to test the impact of ArtsSmarts for students and teachers.

Engaging students

In our research so far, (www.artssmarts.ca/en/research--reports/research.aspx), the particularly strong impact of ArtsSmarts for students with special needs is noteworthy. This approach is levelling the playing field for many students who typically have difficulty in learning and showing what they know through text and print. Through ArtsSmarts they find themselves engaged in an interactive process that often takes them beyond what they believe they are capable of doing. Teachers typically notice how students have fewer behaviour problems and feel much more successful during ArtsSmarts’ projects:

- He discovered he could do something. He had given up at school already and he used to say, “I can’t, I can’t.” He raises his hand now and takes a risk.”
- “They learned about sides of themselves that they didn’t know they had... They think that they are better inside now than they thought.”

- “Some [students] begin with big needs; at the end they see themselves as someone not with needs but as a thinker who can answer others’ needs.”

The first two years of data also suggest that the disruptive behaviours many teachers have voiced their concerns about in recent years are not prevalent during ArtsSmarts projects. Students who are often marginalized experience an increased sense of belonging. There is also clear evidence of stronger teamwork among students who often avoid each other because of differences and active participation for students who are often too shy to join in group learning. What’s most striking to many teachers is how students with identified special needs are so often the students that really shine during the project and continue to do so later in their day-to-day classes. (Dunleavy, 2011).

Engaging teachers

Our research was designed to explore the impact of ArtsSmarts on student engagement. Through one-to-one interviews we also began to see significant growth among teachers, particularly in their understanding of students’ capacities and the reflections they made about their own practices. For many teachers, classrooms became a compelling space for professional learning during the ArtsSmarts projects. As they,

“watched artists lead students through the creative process they were often transported out of their own comfort zones and here they found...opportunities to discover how to facilitate deeper learning by placing fewer boundaries or structures around students’ work.” (Dunleavy, 2011, p.13)

As one teacher said, “[the experience] stretched me. It made me realize that structure is good, but creativity has an equally important part and [the artist] helped me with that—not to put so many boundaries around them.”

Next steps

The unique experiences provided through ArtsSmarts, especially as they relate to creative inquiry and learning to “let go” to allow for greater student choice and a more authentic voice in their learning, have the potential to make a real difference in students’ experiences in classrooms.

Before students begin to experience the impact of these shifts, however, changes in classroom practices need to run deeply in the experiences of teachers. This is a process that takes time, ongoing support and collaboration not just among teacher–artist teams,

but also among other teachers and schools, school boards and system-wide leaders (Katz, Earl and Ben Jaafar, 2009).

In conclusion, we challenge leaders and teachers alike to “shake loose” the resources that have been “invested in the old way of doing things” so that they can be fully exploited for making what is most innovative about the ArtsSmarts approach—including, engagement, new ways of learning and expressing knowledge, creative inquiry—an enduring part of students and teachers’ everyday experiences in classrooms. (Tamarack, Institute of Community Learning, 2006)

To learn more about ArtsSmarts please go to www.artsmarts.ca. ○

Jodene Dunleavy is a freelance education writer and research consultant. She has worked with provincial Departments and Ministries of Education, regional school boards, national organizations such as ArtsSmarts and the Canadian Education Association.

Julie Hobbs, retired Assistant Director General from Riverside School Board, Saint-Lambert, Quebec, is coordinator of the Quebec

ArtsSmarts Research Project, under the direction of the Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Quebec.

For a full list of references, email ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.

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The Magic of Music

By Karen Branscombe

With commitment, vision and purpose comes success!

And, in this case, success in New Brunswick is based on success in Venezuela! Sistema NB opened its doors to 50 students in October 2009. Based on a commitment by the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra (NBYO) and School District 2 to bring about social change through music, a program now beaming with pride and success was born. With over 160 students in the program in 2011-2012, transformation change is happening in New Brunswick. Talent is obvious and the real net gains are being seen and felt in the classrooms and in the families of the children involved in the program. What could be better than this?

Venezuela has been home to a program so extraordinary because it has changed the lives of over 300,000 children. El Sistema (the system) welcomes all children who walk through the door with enthusiasm and commitment to learn. They receive an instrument of their



choice and free instruction each and every day of the week after school.

In New Brunswick, a group of leaders from the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra visited the Venezuela program and came back ready to begin at home. School District 2 was the initial partner and the leading benefactor of this amazing project. By providing dedicated space for the initial class, transportation for students and access to Grades 1 to 3 students at four center city schools, District 2 quickly saw a win/win situation. The response from students and their families was overwhelming! With 50 students involved in a free after school program with professional musicians teaching them how to play the violin, viola, cello and bass, how could we possibly lose?

During the past three school years, the Sistema students have performed for many audiences. Venezuelan Conductor, Antonio Delgado, who himself is a product of El Sistema, came to us as the first guest Teacher in Residence. Students now play strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. And, as with all great programs, the learning is being shared with other districts and regions in Canada.

Sistema NB held a conference in New Brunswick in May, 2011. Educators, musicians and community leaders came from all regions of Canada to learn about the success. Knowing that a prototype is established, many communities see this as a positive way to make change with children.

The real proof is with the families of our young children. Parents of many of our

musicians have struggled to provide opportunities for their children. They now talk with pride about the talent and work ethic of their youngsters and it is evident that the responsibility and self-discipline needed to participate five days a week in this after school program is impacting their school day and family life. These children have real purpose for attending to their school work and their home responsibilities; they do not want to lose the privilege of participating in this program.

The benefits of music to growth, development and positive change are known to musicians. Sistema NB has taken this knowledge and found an avenue to make it happen. The children of New Brunswick will long be impacted by the work of a few dedicated and committed adults. Being visionary was part of the plan. Hard work and a long-term commitment is now part of the work. Hours are spent finding donors for instruments and advocating for government funding. And when you hear the incredible stillness in the room before the first note is played, you know that this program is worth all of the hours and dollars it takes.

Win/win? Yes, it is and NBYO, New Brunswick and School District 2 are very proud! Visit www.nbyo-ojnb.com/sistemانب for more details. ○

Karen Branscombe has been Superintendent of School District 2 in New Brunswick for nine years. Her work in education for the past 30 years has included being a classroom teacher, vice principal and principal.



SPECIAL FOCUS



Classroom Websites: Bringing School and Home One Step Closer Together

By Simon Bélanger and Jeffrey Jordan

As teachers, there are certain aspects of a child's learning process that we can manage and others we cannot. For example, we can manage the learning environment, routines and structures set in our classrooms. We can also manage the lessons and information delivered to them. Once the students leave our classes, however, we no longer have any control over how they pursue their development at home. For some kids it is easy because they are independent, mature enough and have developed the necessary organizational skills to handle the day to day requirements of school. Others struggle to stay organized and up to date with their work.

We realize it is also a challenge for parents to try to be constantly aware of what their child is doing in class. As teachers meeting parents, we too often hear questions such as, "What has Timmy been working on in class?" or "How come Timmy never has any homework?" Communication between school and home is always difficult. As high school teachers, we cannot read and sign 120 agendas, check 120 school bags and advise all parents of upcoming assignments and evaluations. From this challenge arose the idea of starting classroom websites.

Using Google Sites, we created user-friendly web pages for students and parents. This tool is easy for teachers to create and manage, as well as for users to consult and navigate, without requiring any expert computer skills. Our sites post information about topics being covered, homework and projects, dates to remember and even extra-curricular events. Important notes and worksheets can also be made available for viewing or downloading, resolving issues of, "I couldn't do my work because I forgot my paper at school." All this information can now be easily accessed from any computer or smartphone.

The next obstacle became making sure students and parents were aware and making use of the tools available. We decided to focus on parents first, creating a way for them to verify the information being brought home. In other words, a way to confirm the "no homework," or

"nothing to study" statements. Step one was to send a letter home. This letter informed parents of the new websites and the information that could be accessed. The letters had to be signed and returned, to ensure that they received the news and web address. With our sites now in their third year of operation, this letter is now part of our "first day of class" handouts. Step two, was to reinforce the use of our new sites in every following communication with a parent. For example, notes in the agenda, phone calls, e-mails and parent/teacher interviews.

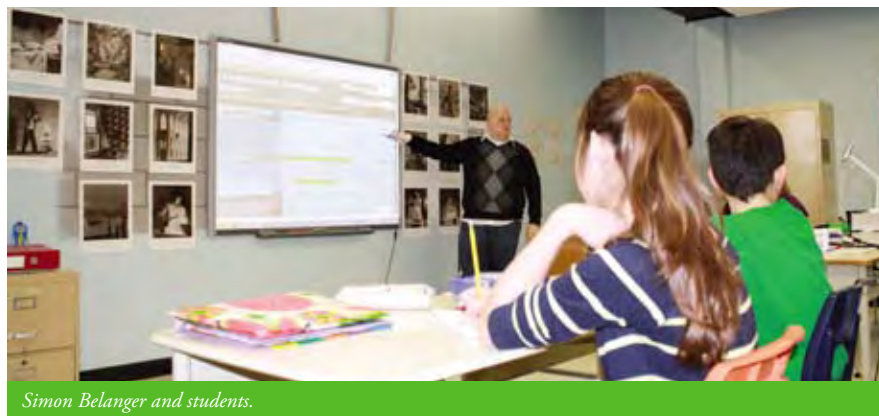
For our students, we knew these sites needed to be used as a motivational tool. With that in mind, we introduced them to our websites by posting video and blog assignments. With a few simple clicks of the mouse, teachers can post YouTube videos, discussion topics, or many other interesting links related to current course material. This gave students a reason to access the sites and a way for us to verify how many of them were using it. Furthermore, with access to

a classroom computer and projector, the website can be displayed in class, for everyone to see. Changes and postings can be made on the spot, right before the students' eyes.

With these sites now acting as key elements in our daily class routines, we have noticed an improvement in several key areas. First, concerned parents are happy at how easy it is for them to access information concerning their child's learning. Second, the amount of homework being completed has started to increase. More importantly, however, students are learning to become more independent and responsible for following up on the progress of their individual studies and learning. ○

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Simon Belanger and students.



Jeffrey Jordan and students.



The Quiet Revolution: Student Owned Devices

By Brenda MacDonald



In Red Deer Catholic, a quiet revolution is taking place in classrooms; we are seeing more and more schools encouraging their students to bring their own devices. The power and flexibility of mobile technology is transforming both education and learning. However, we needed to improve how students were learning through the use of their own devices.

Factors effecting our decision to proceed with mobile devices, first and foremost, are that these devices are central to the way students communicate and engage. In addition, student expectations are changing; they prefer to have anytime, any pace and any place conveniences. Because of this varied use of technology outside the classroom, their actual learning styles are changing and a widening technology gap was occurring. Mobile learning is a cost effective way to avoid leaving students behind in their understanding and use of technology and thus lowering the technology gap. In classrooms where students are able to bring their own device, they discovered how to use their “own” devices and extended their learning beyond the school walls.

Additional learning is occurring because students have equitable access and ability to perform the same tasks through recent innovations of networking and cloud computing. A smart phone is now a gateway to knowledge and no longer a device for texting or playing games. It is powerful for students to know that they have a learning tool with them at all times. These were the most compelling aspects for examining student owned devices.

Red Deer Catholic began investigating students bringing their own devices in a small pilot project at St. Thomas school in 2010. A year later, the Board of Trustees made the following recommendations based on the pilot about student owned devices. The recommendations included that teaching staff receive professional development; the technologies focus on curricular outcomes; all students receive digital citizenship training and have equitable access to devices.

With the above protocols, Red Deer Catholic began a proactive campaign to move teachers forward to accommodate change. The district initiated an action research project to encourage educators to become contributing members to an ever-increasing technological and global society. The action research focus was to improve engagement and achievement

for all students by bridging the digital divide and enhancing instruction. The ingenuity provided an opportunity for teachers to explore various mobile devices and participate in a 10-week project. Secondly, digital citizenship lessons were created for all students. Thirdly, the school division increased bandwidth to accommodate the projected need and reevaluated the content filtering guidelines.

Finally, there were extensive professional development opportunities for district leaders and interested staff on how to use the various devices to engage students in their learning. There is a significant shift in use of technology, engagement of students and the use of student owned devices. Red Deer Catholic has become a community of inquiry.

The journey looks decidedly different for each one of the district schools. Some schools have full implementation and others are just “dipping their toe in the water.” The accumulated knowledge from early adopter administrators and action researcher participants makes up the content in the administrator tool kit to support administrators. The kit provides direction to those administrators new to technology integration. The tool kit includes guiding questions on vision, professional development, student learning, assessment, equity, educating parents, management, safety and technology to guide schools to making positive choices. (View entire documents at <http://rdcrd3dproject.wikispaces.com/Student+Owned+Devices>). The administrator tool kit increases shared collective knowledge and lessens isolation.

Students see smart phones as a potential learning tool. Although the progress, in the world of student owned devices, has been slow and methodical, a great deal of knowledge was acquired and a powerful community of learners established. Red Deer Catholic acknowledges and embraces the richness of the once-banned connected devices. Next steps are ensuring that these devices be used in powerful ways with a focus on 21st century competencies, thus, preparing students for a future that is unknown to us. ○

Brenda MacDonald is presently the Curriculum Coordinator for Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools.



SPECIAL FOCUS



Early Literacy iPod Touch Project

By Ryan Ewaskiw and Gidget Davidson

Share with others, play fair, don't hit and press the home button if you get confused! These classroom rules may be heard in one of 18 schools participating in an Early Literacy iPod Touch Project. In the fall of 2011, Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) was selected by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and the Ministry of Education for a "Teaching and Learning in a Digital World" Pilot for System Learning initiative. TVDSB is one of several school boards in Ontario participating in the theme of Mobiles/Handhelds/Tablets - Innovative Teaching. Through inquiry investigation, early years educators have been exploring the impact of using iPod touch devices as they are integrated into early years (EY) literacy development.

The goal of this project is to provide early years educators access to a wide range of resources to enhance student learning through the use of handheld mobile technology. Each class has a kit containing five iPod devices and protective cases. The iPod Touch devices offer many uses both for the educators and students. Educational applications (apps) from the iTunes App Store (free and purchased) are used in the project.

Our inquiry project investigated the impact of the implementation of iPod Touch devices in three areas:

1. Student engagement;
2. Instructional practice; and
3. Student outcomes.

As you could expect, students were really excited to "have their turn" at using the devices. Not all students had been exposed to iPod devices before the project, but not surprisingly, they quickly became very adept and comfortable at using the educational apps. Initially, teachers reported that some of the other learning centres became less interesting for students. However, students would soon

become disinterested if new apps were not available for use. One of the key findings of this project is that the apps, although captivating, are only *one* feature of the mobile devices. It's in the use of the other features of the device (email, voice memos, camera and video recording), where the real student engagement has occurred in classrooms.

Many budding young news reporters, videographers and photographers have been cultivated as a result of this project. Susan Bruyns, principal of Wilfrid Jury P.S. in London, Ontario, was very pleased with the way the EY students at her school were utilizing the handheld technology. Bruyns articulated that she was initially concerned about the decrease in the amount of interactive play among the students. She also acknowledged that using iPod devices provides the opportunity for the important social networking/collaboration aspect of technology.

Teacher Lora Neal of Byron Southwood P.S. said: "[The iPod] is such a tremendous tool to support oral language development, which is a key component in the early years program and it has considerable impact on supporting student differentiation. I also recognized this year that these devices can bridge community relationships (i.e., interview staff and principal, parent volunteers interviewing children and sharing voice recordings with parents). It is such a helpful tool for documenting student learning."

One of the most powerful aspects of this project was that teachers were able to network with other teachers and learn from each other. Teachers met on three occasions for training, to discuss the parameters of the inquiry, and to share experiences and findings.

It is challenging to measure the specific impact of the devices on student growth. A few examples, though, are: they provide opportunities for reluctant writers to type messages when traditional paper/pencil use is a challenge; some teachers note improvement in students



willing to take risks with writing independently, phonemic spelling in writing activities and phonological awareness skills; and, when students were asked how the project helped with learning, one replied, "now sounding out words is easier."

The use of iPod Touch technology in the classroom opens up endless opportunities for both teachers and students to explore signature learning opportunities. ○

Ryan Ewaskiw (OCT, Med) has been the Learning Technologies Coordinator for Thames Valley District School Board for four and a half years, and has been an educator for 15 years. He can be reached by Twitter: @ryaneewaskiw; by email, r.ewaskiw@tvdsb.on.ca or via his webpage, www.tvdsb.ca/ryan.

Gidget Davidson (OCT) is currently a Learning Technologies Coordinator for TVDSB. She has been an elementary educator for 16 years. She can be reached by Twitter: @GIDavidson; by email, g.davidson@tvdsb.on.ca or via her webpage, www.tvdsb.ca/gidget.



The Power of Five: The Growing of a Great Idea

By Julie Hobbs, Bob Matthey, Duffy Kraus, Isabelle Lessard,
Chantale Scroggins and Clémence Trotéchaud

The breakfast meeting is underway early in the morning at a local eatery in Beloeil, Quebec, in the heart of the Richelieu Valley. Five principals and the School Administrators' Support Team member accompanying them are discussing whether it is a good idea to bring their five schools together for professional learning opportunities during the year. All have a basic understanding of professional learning communities and many years ago these same five schools were part of a small community school board before regionalization.

Spurred on by the fact that all school boards in Quebec have a Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) mandate to reduce the drop-out rate and increase the graduation rate to at least 80 per cent by 2020, they are keen to explore ways to meet their goals set for each of their schools. In this school board, as in many in Quebec, boys are dragging in graduation rates by 10 per cent behind the girls.

This is how it begins: a collaboration of five schools in the Richelieu Valley. From this meeting and others like it in the next few weeks, ideas for a common professional development day and the participation of teachers in the development and planning of the day emerge. Little do they know at the time that they intuitively will build into their planning many of the elements needed for successful learning communities and networks. (Katz, Earl and Ben Jaafar, 2009, p.11)

What will it take to grow this idea? The principals strategize on how to fund this project, determine what the next steps are and it takes off from there. Not without its hurdles, however; the principals have

What is thought to be an end-product really becomes the beginning of a creating and sharing of promising practices across the Valley Schools.

to explain to school board authorities that this type of network is innovative and not equivalent of a single school's professional development activity for funding. New rules have to be created.

First, each principal proposes the idea of learning together to their staff and they come up with an agreement for a commonly chosen pedagogical day in December. Then a small team from each school attends a local symposium on differentiation as a launching point and ideas begin to gel.

Teachers in each cycle (Grades 1-2, 3-4, 5-6) then begin to meet to look at their best practices and activities and to offer suggestions for a resource book that will be shared in each cycle on the common pedagogical day. Teachers are polled for what they would like to learn. Principals and two teachers (resource and classroom teacher) from each school meet to look at the framework for a common pedagogical day and to take those plans back to each of the schools for tweaking.

Board-level consultants are asked to participate and to share their expertise with the teachers in a variety of workshop sessions from which teachers can choose. Some teachers from other schools with a particular expertise are asked as well.

December 9 arrives. The host school, William Latter, has set up tables for the 100 plus attendees. Coffee mugs from a local Tim Horton's are available for each of the teachers as a take-away and there is a feast laid

out. There are fidget tools and chocolates on tables for the active learners. Everyone is excited. It is a happening. Everyone experiences a variety of learning activities during the day designed to persuade teachers to reflect on their current practices and how to best meet the needs of their students. There is time built in to share their own best practices with each other from the resource book they have developed together.

What is thought to be an end-product really becomes the beginning of a creating and sharing of promising practices across the Valley Schools. The principals and teachers understand that "improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines...and engage actively in supporting one another's professional growth" (Katz, Earl and Ben Jaafar, 2009, p. 13).

The rest (and best) is yet to come! ○

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SPECIAL FOCUS



Learning Coach Program Supports Inclusion

By Lisa Bussiere and Gina Daus

Edmonton Catholic Schools began a journey in 2009 to establish school-based teacher leaders to support programming for all students. Every school in the district was asked to identify a teacher in the school to be a *Learning Team Coordinator* (LTC). The LTC was envisioned to be the main person in the school to coordinate the identification of special learner needs and to help all learners access services. Once per month the LTCs gathered for professional development to support their roles in the schools.

In 2010, our district formalized the role of Learning Team Coordinator and the majority of schools were funded for a 0.5 FTE position. The benefits of having an identified individual in the building with dedicated time to support authentic inclusion of all students were immediately obvious. Again, the LTCs were brought together at various points throughout the school year for professional development sessions that included assistive technology, universal design for learning and differentiated instruction.

In spring 2011, our district began closely examining the role of a learning coach. We considered Alberta Education's role definition for learning coaches as well as that of other noted researchers such as Jim Knight and Joellen Killion. Principals learned about the expectations of the new role. Our district committed to funding a 0.6 FTE learning coach for every school, starting in September 2011.

We knew that those newly-appointed to the learning coach position would need professional development and support. We conceptualized a professional peer-support model that involved 20 lead learning coaches (LLCs) being chosen. The criteria for this leadership position was developed and applicants had to be recommended as a Lead Coach (LC) by their principal. These 20 LLCs were to work

with a cohort of four or five learning coaches each. The responsibilities of the LLCs were to engage in and facilitate professional development, mentor and collaborate with LCs from their cohort.

For the first four months, the lead coaches did not meet with their cohorts. Instead, we wanted them to engage in their own professional development to prepare them for their mentorship role. The 20 coaches met on five separate occasions for half day workshops, which were designed to promote and support a clear vision of the LLC role, the LC role and enhance the skills of the LLC. The training offered included the benefits of coaching, analyzed what good coaches do, how to implement instructional coaching, how to build relationships with your cohort and teachers, effective strategies to engage teachers and students and how to work effectively with groups to achieve a purpose and an outcome.

In January, the LLCs met with their cohorts to engage, collaborate and begin to build a relationship with them. Meeting monthly in small groups proved to be a powerful way to develop rapport, problem solve, exchange ideas and resources, and provide opportunity to better understand their role in the school and the supports required.

In addition to the support of the LLC for the learning coaches, ongoing professional development ensued in the district for all learning coaches on Universal Design for Learning, assistive technology in the classroom, how principals can support the learning coach and how coaches can best support teachers. The intent of the professional development was to promote and support the role of the LC and build leadership capacity.

A clear vision of the purpose and role of the learning coach is imperative to this model's success. The individuals chosen, the training involved, and the type and quantity of professional development are important decisions to make before implementing the model.



This role will continue to evolve in our district over the next few years. As this journey proceeds, we will continue to tailor our support and professional development based on frequent communication with the learning coaches, the lead coaches, teachers and principals. Already it is clear that the role of learning coach is becoming imbedded in the fabric of Edmonton Catholic Schools. ○

Lisa Bussiere has a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Education in Special Education from the University of Alberta. She is a Learning Coach at Louis St. Laurent School as well as a Lead Learning Coach.

Gina Daus has a Bachelor of Education with a minor in Special Education and a Graduate Diploma in Religious Education. She is an Inclusive Programming Consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools.



Transformational Change: From Library to Learning Commons

By Tom D'Amico

The Ottawa Catholic School Board is in the process of transitioning its 81 school libraries to learning commons that are more reflective of learning in the 21st century. The model of collecting text-based resource materials and securing them in a central location is changing. By the end of the 2012 academic year the board will have transitioned 37 of its schools; the remaining libraries will be converted over the next two years, pending budget allocations. To create new collaboration space, approximately one third of rarely-used reference books are being donated to other countries, one third of subject specific books are being relocated into classrooms and one third of high-interest reading materials are being more prominently featured in the learning commons.

What is a learning commons?

As reflected in the board planning document "Towards 2020 – Connecting with our Students", the learning commons is the central gathering location for students and staff to extend their learning whether it is text-based or digital. Access to online information and spaces

for collaborative, creative work and inquiry learning is central to the new learning commons. Access to digital collections is extended beyond the traditional school day.

School application process

Schools were invited to submit a learning commons proposal to receive funding and support with their transition. Proposals were only accepted digitally using Google Apps for Education as a means to share school plans and model the use of technology throughout the process. Each application included the following components:

- **School Learning Commons Committee:** A minimum of three teachers, two students, one administrator, one parent and library staff
- **Technology request:** A focus on mobile devices (tablets, iPads, netbooks, laptops) to a maximum of \$20,000.
- **Asset management:** An outline of how the mobile devices would be managed in the school.
- **Link to school improvement plan:** An outline of how the changes to a learning commons would support the school focus on student achievement.
- **School funds:** An outline of what school funds or council funds would supplement the funding from the board.
- **Infrastructure requests:** An outline of physical changes such as removing stacks of books and relocating books to the outside of the room, power installation for mobile devices, and the creation of inviting reading and collaboration areas.
- **Flexible furniture:** Think Starbucks—modular furniture, couches, stools, etc. (\$5,000 elementary, \$10,000 secondary).
- **SmartBoard and wall mounted LCD projector:** Must be used primarily for student use with open access to student and school owned devices.
- **Library configuration changes:** Outline how the space will be changed to promote collaboration, creative problem solving, critical thinking and communication.
- **Digital resources:** Outline of how digital resources will be promoted and accessed in the learning commons.

- **Skill development:** Outline how students and staff will improve their skills while accessing the learning commons.
- **Promotion:** Outline how the students and staff will promote the learning commons.
- **Learning commons programs:** Outline the non-traditional uses of the space, i.e. Slam poetry contests, human library days, music days, etc.

Additional support

Library supervisor, Donna Presz, and educational technology consultant, Gabe Massicotte, shared the learning commons concept with the following groups: library staff, principals, school councils, trustees and senior executives. Each committee received ready-made presentations and resource documents. It was important to stress that the changes were meant to balance print and digital resources, and also to promote reading in a friendlier and more inviting environment.

Transition away from teacher resource centres

For many years, the board supported a central resource center staffed by a library supervisor and a teacher librarian. This service was discontinued. Funds saved were reallocated towards some of the costs of the transitions and to license a web 2.0 library management system, Destiny Follett, that would allow all 81 schools to share resources online, and for students to access and reserve learning common resources via any web browser or using a new board-wide iPod/iPad app.

Learning commons in action

Visit the St. Joseph high school learning commons blog (<http://stjosephlibrary.blogspot.ca>). More information on learning commons can be found by visiting the Ontario Library Association website (www.accessola.org) and reviewing "Together for Learning - School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons." ○

Tom D'Amico is the superintendent of Student Success – Learning Technologies with the Ottawa Catholic School Board. The board has 81 schools serving 36,000 students.



SPECIAL FOCUS



Reporting Real Learning, One Day at a Time

By Kelly D. Wilkins and George Couros

184 Days of Learning is a pretty simple idea. It is an online space where contributors answer the question “What did you learn today?” Each day of the school year a different author posts a personal response to the question and the published posts and comments are available to the world. It turns out that this simple idea, modeled after a similar project in Atlanta, has become a very effective tool and a great way to make our learning public.

Contributors to the 184 Days have the opportunity to explore their thoughts and to be reflective about their learning in a place that is both open and safe. Effective instructional practice reminds us that writing needs to be real, meaningful and relevant and that writers need an authentic audience. It doesn't get any more real than giving writers a space to tell their story in a very personal way.

The topic is wide open and the writer gets to decide on the reportable learning—remember, learning happens within and beyond the classroom. Imagine the excitement on the day that a random health care advocate stumbled across the very powerful message that a middle years student posted about her learning, spending a day with her mother trying to get health care services! Learning takes on a whole new meaning when students can write about what they are really learning as opposed to what the curriculum or timetable might say.

We pride ourselves on being a learning organization; one that expects high quality learning and growth for students, staff, trustees and parents—for everyone involved in the educational enterprise. 184 Days has presented a wonderful opportunity to celebrate learning throughout the jurisdiction. The invitation to author a contribution has been inclusive. Interested writers are simply asked to sign up indicating when they would like to participate. It has been exciting to read the reflections of students, teachers, parents, administration,

Contributors, including students, educators and members of the community, answer the question: “What did you learn today?”



trustees and secretaries, and staff from transportation, facilities, human resources and communications. We have had former students and future teachers submit. The superintendent has contributed, as have learners from early years, middle years and high school.

And then there has been a huge cross section of people who have written comments back to the authors. Imagine what it means to any author to have his current or former teacher, his grandma or parent, neighbor or friend provide a thoughtful, encouraging and positive response. In some cases it is a perfect stranger who responds. There is so much validation and encouragement in the comments that have been posted to all of the authors. Sometimes a question is posed, which prompts further conversation. Sometimes it is just an incredibly hopeful comment and a healthy deposit in the emotional bank account of the writer. We believe that relationships are the foundation for successful teaching and learning. The 184 Days of Learning has created a new frontier for developing relationships.

In these times of transformation with so much hype about social media, how students should be taught to use technology “to the side of good rather than evil” and a never ending

discussion and debate about digital literacy, acceptable use policies, cell phone protocol and cyber bullying—all of which are very real and valid questions—it has been refreshing to find promise with a learning environment that is so appropriate, so meaningful and so engaging.

The unique learning space has connected our schools to each other and has helped to create a sense of unity across the jurisdiction. It has become a daily routine for many of us to pop over to the website at the end of the day to see who has written and what they have learned. If you are curious, we invite you to visit 184 Days of Learning to experience some pretty compelling thoughts and ideas about the learning that has been happening for people in Parkland School Division.

Please feel free to learn with us at www.psdblogs.ca/184. ○

Kelly Wilkins currently serves as Deputy Superintendent with Parkland School Division. Her daily goal is to solve more problems than she creates and most days she is successful.

George Couros is the Division Principal of Innovative Teaching & Learning. He strives to use technology to transform learning and to build meaningful relationships across PSD70.



The AfterMath Blogging Project



Teacher Peter Gardiner discussing learning on Facebook with his Grade 11 class.

By Ron DeBoer

The idea for the AfterMath Blogging Project came to me while working with educational consultant Damian Cooper on an assessment initiative in our school board. Cooper's thinking intersected with a book I was reading at the time, Douglas Reeves' *Finding Your Leadership Focus: What Matters Most to Student Learning*. Cooper believes that student feedback is essential for teachers to plan assessments and inform

classroom instruction. Reeves' research shows that when students engage in non-fiction writing about their math learning, they achieve to a higher standard in math.

Out of this intersection came the AfterMath Blogging Project at Galt Collegiate. It has helped meet two of the school's goals: using technology to support learning and allowing students a voice to give feedback about their own learning.

What is the AfterMath Project?

The purpose of the AfterMath Blogging Project is to engage math students, along with their teacher and vice-principal, in an online forum discussing math learning. We created Facebook groups in a variety of math classes (Grades 9 to 12), in which we posed guiding questions for students to respond to and which ignite discussion. Drawing from the work of Bernadette Russek, among others, the questions we posed ranged from "what makes an effective math teacher?" to "how did you prepare for last night's unit test?"

What the teachers said:

- "It's helpful to know what areas of content need more attention when students post specific questions about the work." (Gillian Graham, junior math teacher)
- "There's a record of the whole semester I can look back on to inform my planning for next semester." (Peter Gardiner, senior math teacher)

What the students said:

- "I found that when I was given permission to write about how I was feeling about math, I could get down to the business of math more quickly—I knew the teacher knew how I felt." (Reanne, Grade 11 student)
- "If one kid doesn't get something, there's probably other kids who don't get it—with the AfterMath Blogging Project we can know what each other is thinking." (Emily, Grade 11)

Examples of prompts/guiding questions

- Create a Math superhero based on the unit we are doing right now and justify your choice.
- My best experience with math was when...
- My worst experience with math was when...
- When I study for a math test I...
- I need more help understanding...

Soon students began posting their own questions about the content and thoughts about different ways the math could be taught and learned. For instance, one student in a Grade 9 applied level math class posted: "It really helped when you drew the diagrams on the board today. I learn better when I see the work." With this feedback, the teacher returned to class and engaged in a discussion with students about the different ways they learn.

There were two other important aspects to the AfterMath Blogging Project. One, the project allowed me, as instructional leader, the opportunity to engage in ongoing professional dialogue with teachers. Anytime I bumped into teachers in the halls, the conversation came around to the project discussion going on at the time. This dialogue inevitably led to conversations about formative assessment and other means to gather student feedback to inform teacher instruction.

Second, the project gave me an opportunity to meet with students. I would ask questions like: Does being in an online discussion help you learn better? What do you learn from reading the thoughts of your classmates? Allowing students to give feedback and then inviting them into a discussion about the value gave students an important voice.

AfterWhat?

Plans are firmly in place to expand the project beyond the math classroom. This fall, several AfterWord Facebook groups are being created in English classes and an AfterTaste group is being set up in a senior Food and Nutrition class. As well, AfterFrench groups are in the works. Someone joked we could set up an AfterLife group for the World Religion class that could go on for a very long time!

With the Ontario Ministry of Education's increasing emphasis on e-learning and blended-learning, the AfterMath Blogging Project seems like a natural fit for the 21st century classroom. ○

Ron DeBoer is vice-principal at Galt Collegiate Institute and chair of the secondary school vice-principals' association with the Waterloo Region District School Board. He also teaches Honour Specialist English online for the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.



SPECIAL FOCUS



Leveraging Learning Through Literacy@School Classrooms

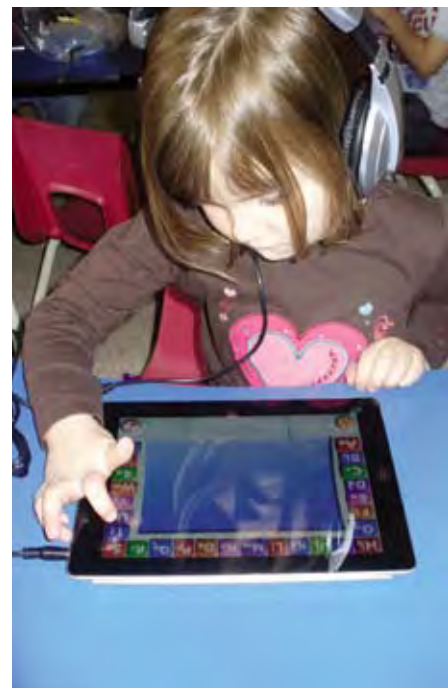
By Beate Planche and Todd Wright

Engagement, innovation and digital literacy—ingredients which fuel a group of exciting classrooms in the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) in Ontario. Over the past decade YRDSB has moved from having a few demonstration classrooms where designated teachers “demonstrated” for those who visited the classrooms as observers (a passive model of learning) to over 200 Literacy@School (L@S) Learning Centre classrooms (a more active learning model). L@S teachers engage peers in their schools as well as peers across schools in conversations as co-learners while sharing how they themselves have learned to develop strong digital learning skills. To move digital literacy forward it is the goal of the board to host at least one L@S classroom in every school.

The evolution of L@S classes from a demo classroom model to a learning centre model has revolved around two main themes: identifying and practicing effective instructional strategies; and developing an understanding of digital learning environments. The ways in which these two areas interact with and impact on each other forms the basis for understanding student learning in classrooms today. As the program had some influence on the schools where it was being developed, the interest in growing the program into other schools became apparent. There are now over 200 teachers involved in the Literacy@School network of learners.

Co-learning is becoming an embedded feature of the York Region District School Board’s culture. Every school is involved in a learning network and L@S teachers have the advantage of being in a network of co-learners within this program as well. Through the York Region’s Curriculum and Instructional Services L@S teachers are given a modest amount of release time to work together and each L@S class is supported with technology that is designed to support learning.

Teachers enhance their work through participation in an online community as well.



Teachers who gain confidence integrating new and emerging technologies are also in a better position to influence and support their peers. L@S teachers are open to sharing practice across L@S classrooms and many of these teachers feel empowered to lead the system in finding new ways to share learning.

A clear side benefit of supporting this group of engaged educators is that it has fuelled further innovation and creativity as teachers share practices within and across classrooms. The place of innovation in our L@S classrooms has become one of the lasting legacies from the original years of the project. Teachers in the program have tended to be those leaders who will take ideas and move them into the mainstream in their classes. Our responsibility at a system level is to find ways to operationalize best practice in identifying what makes the most difference to children’s learning. Innovation is an important goal of the program as L@S classrooms are selected for proof of concept projects using emerging technologies.

One of the challenges of such a program is that of replication and sustainability. Each Literacy@School site has the opportunity to

join the Board’s Blueprints for Change process. The Blueprint engages each school in a consultative process combining resources of the school with central resources of the Board. The intent is the replication of the L@S classrooms.

The investment in professional learning and appropriate technology has proven its worth in terms of observable changes in classroom practice and in school decision-making. Likewise, there have been some observable shifts in the learning culture at both local and system levels. The classroom as a learning centre and as a dynamic learning environment for teachers is a concept that has taken root and proven to be an effective strategy that supports schools as they move learning forward. ○

Dr. Beate Planche is the Superintendent of Curriculum and Instructional Services in the York Region School Board. Todd Wright is a Curriculum Administrator for ICT and Learning Resource Services in the York Region DSB. He is also administrator for the Literacy@School program.



Wellness for All

By Jackie Bajus

Within the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCD SB),

the simultaneous growth of concerns for the emotional well being of students and staff has significantly escalated over the past several years. While teachers and school administrators have voiced concerns about the rising identification of children and youth demonstrating increasingly worrisome behaviours, board administrators have noted increased absenteeism, poor morale, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and drug and alcohol abuse among all employee groups.

A series of discussions over the past three years identified parallel concerns about the mental well being of students and staff that prompted a call to action. The theme of “Wellness for All” as a system initiative emerged.

“Wellness for All” has become the mantra for the mental wellness programs. All employee groups have fully endorsed the professional development opportunities offered during work hours, online and after hours on a voluntary basis. These sessions encompass two foci: 1) awareness and strategies for staff for promoting and nurturing better personal mental health; and 2) knowledge and understanding of resources available to help family members, friends and students. At the school level, teachers and administrators have promoted site-based activities to provide students with age appropriate understandings of mental illness, of how even typical students have moments of anxiety and stress, and of coping strategies.

Through the Respectful Workplace Advisor, a variety of programs and resources have been provided to assist employees, including an e-learning module entitled “Mental Health in the Workplace”. This program has been augmented with a series of after hour sessions on such topics as



domestic violence, resiliency and stress. Two system-wide professional activity days were devoted to the theme of well-being, one day focusing on staff only and the second day addressing both adult and student mental health. As a result of these initiatives, the HWCD SB was awarded the Level 1 status of the Mental Health in the Workplace Program from Excellence Canada, the first school board to be recognized.

Through collaboration within the Hamilton community, ongoing projects have been developed with local health, welfare and education organizations that produced a mental health literacy resource entitled “Making a Difference”, a compilation of “awareness” guides for teachers to help identify and respond to students demonstrating signs of “at risk” behaviours. As part of the regional Child and Youth Mental Health Information Network, devoted to mental health literacy initiatives and the knowledge mobilization for educators, a series of newsletters have been created on several relevant topics.

At the school level, mental health events have included the Peer Mentor program, the establishment of the “iMatter” program (winners of the Canadian Champion of Mental Health Award) delivered by teens to incoming Grade 9 students at Cardinal Newman CSS, and the growth of the Best Buddies program to support the students with special education needs. An interactive program for elementary students challenged

them to work on wellness projects as defined in the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

In-services were held for teams of elementary and secondary staff about mood issues and social skills in relation to non-verbal learning disabilities. As partners with the coterminous school board and Public Health, a two-day provincial conference was hosted by the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition entitled “Mental Wellness: Building Capacity with the School Community,” with school and Board staff presenting and attending.

In conclusion, staff are feeling “heard” in their requests to seek more information on how to 1) support and respond professionally to youth displaying mental health issues; 2) address their own personal well-being; and 3) cope more effectively with colleagues and family members exhibiting symptoms of mental illness. With a strategic focus to provide students with enhanced awareness of signs of mental illness and strategies on how to seek appropriate supports, as well as developing personal coping techniques, it is hoped that the stigma of mental illness will be reduced and the movement towards mental well-being will become contagious. ○

Jackie Bajus is a Superintendent with the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, having served as a teacher, Special Education Resource Teacher and Principal. Her portfolio includes Special Education, Safe Schools and a family of schools.



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