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Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable Jeff Johnson | Minister of Education

am extremely proud that Alberta's new Education Act was passed in the Legislature this past fall with only minor amendments. Its smooth passage was due, in no small part, to the incredible amount of thought and work that went into its creation from partners like the College of Alberta School Superintedents, including your input during the Inspiring Education consultations.

In 2009, I had the honour of cochairing the Inspiring Education dialogue, under the guidance of then-Education Minister Dave Hancock. With Ministry of Education staff, we set out to discover what our education system should look like for students graduating in 2030.

It was one of the most far-reaching consultations in Alberta's history. We talked to students, parents, teachers, support staff, school administrators, school board trustees, superintendents and thousands of interested Albertans. We travelled across the province, listening carefully to ensure we understood what Albertans wanted in our education system.

During Inspiring Education, we asked: will our education system prepare the next generation of students to be innovative, creative and skilled in managing knowledge as a resource? Will students be ready for a world that we may not be able to envision yet? Your responses, and the input from Albertans from all walks of life, painted a clear picture of what students need in order to have a successful future. The Education Act will play an important role in transforming our education system for the 21st century learner. I know many of you are already student-focused, so in a way, this legislation is finally catching up to you. Now we have to implement it.

What does this mean for you? It means it is time to continue moving forward to bring that vision to life, so students reach their full potential and become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. I know many of you are already student-focused, so in a way, this legislation is finally catching up to you. Now we have to implement it.

The Education Act contains the best of our collective big-picture thinking. The legislation allows for more local decisionmaking. It gives school boards more flexibility while reinforcing their obligation to work collaboratively with communities and post-secondary institutions.

It sets the tone for school jurisdictions to enjoy the freedom and responsibility to deliver education in ways that are meaningful, creative and innovative. However, it is by no means the end of the process required to transform our system.

My ministry and I need your expertise, once again, to take the Education Act off the drawing board and into the classroom. We need to move from the vision of Inspiring Education to concrete policies and regulations.

As educators with a commitment to innovation, I'm sure you have many great ideas about how we can make that happen.

Before the Education Act comes into force, more than 30 corresponding regulations and policies will have to be reviewed and aligned. A regulation is the nuts and bolts of how legislation is translated into action. It often addresses definitions, administrative and approval processes and provides direction on how the legislation impacts your day-to-day operations.

Aligning the regulations to the new Act will ensure a successful transition and strengthen our education system for the future. It is also important that we accurately reflect the vision of the Education Act in these regulations-getting this right is paramount to preserving the integrity of Inspiring Education.

As we have throughout the process, we will continue to seek input from Albertans-in writing, online or faceto-face, as appropriate-as we develop and revise the supporting regulations. We are allowing sufficient time for both the ministry and stakeholders like you to undertake the extensive reviews necessary to align policies, procedures and practices.

For more information on Alberta's Education Act and the regulatory review, please visit www.education.alberta.ca/ educationact.





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President's Message

Craig Foley President College of Alberta School Superintendents

> Our education system must utilize every piece of knowledge, every tool and every strategy to allow them to realize their dream.

n 1913, who could have foreseen the world of 2013? The world was changing very quickly and the learning needs of young people were changing at a very rapid pace. Thomas Edison was pioneering the development of machines for displaying motion pictures, confident that these devices would revolutionize the way students learn. On July 13,1913, the New York Dramatic Mirror, quoted Edison as saying, "Books will soon be obsolete in public schools. Scholars will be instructed through the eye... I do not think every home will have its own projecting machine, although wealthier people will possess them, no doubt."

Of course, we know this was a flawed prediction, as books are still with us today. As a visionary, however, Edison realized the influence new technology could have on the learning environment.

Fast forward to February 1986, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* presented a very familiar prediction: "Every school/ child should have a laptop, because, in the near future, textbooks will become obsolete."

The transformation of education is not something that is new or recent. The transformation of teaching and learning has been happening for decades and is greatly influenced by societal needs, shifting populations, emerging technologies and increased knowledge about how students learn best. What has changed is the speed that these influences need to be addressed. *Inspiring Education* has caused us to reflect on our past successes and ask ourselves, "How can we continue to be one of the most successful education systems in the world for an unpredictable future?"

Alberta's success to date is a tribute to its Ministry of Education, school boards and system leaders, and of course, our front line teachers and principals. We have been innovative and adaptive to new knowledge about how students learn best. We have been willing and able to creatively use new knowledge and new technology to meet the diverse learning styles and learning needs of students. We have remained focused on the student and have been prepared to do whatever it takes to allow them to reach their full potential.

System leaders in Alberta are also becoming more sensitive to the fact that "students have a voice" and need to be involved in the "what", "where" and "how" of their learning. Students want their learning environment to engage them, their lessons to have relevance to the world in which they live and their future to be a place where they have the opportunity to make a difference. Our education system must utilize every piece of knowledge, every tool and every strategy to allow them to realize their dream. Twenty-first century schools have to keep pace with 21st century learners. We have woven new tools into our daily lives-blogging, email, tweeting, texting, Googling, social networking, etc. and we must now acknowledge them in

our places of learning. Faced with a fast changing and complex future, educators have accepted that we need to erect a new vision of what teaching and learning must look like and allow classrooms to start moving at web speed.

Edison spoke of, "being instructed through the eye." Might I suggest that he got it partially right? Today, teaching and learning needs to take place through access to knowledge and experiences involving all of the senses. Innovations in teaching and learning strategies and the access to never-imagined technology are making learning more relevant, more engaging and very exciting.

So, what's next? It is difficult to predict, however, one point is very clear. We must be open to adapt to and take advantage of what we know now and will know in the future about the changing needs of our society and the people who will live in it. We must be prepared to overcome our resistance to change in order to prepare our young people for a world that is growing more connected by the minute. In order to be successful, the role of the teacher will most certainly evolve to a facilitator of learning.

We can all agree that Alberta's students of today deserve our very best efforts to prepare them for a bright and rewarding tomorrow.

Please turn the page to see the make up of our 2013 Provincial Executive.



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Inspiring Education: A Generative Process

By Jim Gibbons

e need to prepare kids for their future, not our past."¹ This was the view of Minister Dave Hancock, when he instituted a process entitled *Inspiring Education* to engage Albertans from all walks of life, in a generative dialogue regarding the future of Alberta's education system.

Systemic Change

Systems often behave according to Newton's Law of Inertia: Every object persists at rest or in uniform motion unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon *it.* System foundations of legislation and policy designed in the past, for the past, move the system forward in a straight path, aligned to produce results that were desired at that time. The direction and norms often become so embedded that any form of change is subject to resistance. The problem is the world is changing; never so much in the history of mankind as it is now. Systems that are not adaptable and able to reinvent themselves are subject to crisis, failure or, at best, mediocrity.

When a system faces crisis there is a sense of urgency to "fix" the problem. In

the case of government, the process most often involves assembling an expert panel to collect the views of stakeholders and special interest groups and to make recommendations for change.

Such was the process with the 2003 Alberta's Commission on Learning (ACOL). I was president of the College of Alberta School Superintendants (CASS) at the time and I can recall the sense of urgency within our organization to gain the perspective of our members and appear before the commission on three different occasions. The 95 recommendations were comprehensive,



intended to adjust the present path, but were not necessarily designed to invoke systemic change, based upon a new vision.

When we "tweak" a system we begin with the fundamental belief that we are heading in the right direction but those implementing the direction either do not understand the "big picture", need to bear down and work harder or we just don't have the right people in the right places. In the end, more than 70 ACOL recommendations were accepted but the legislative framework, the *School Act* (1988), remained largely unchanged.

By contrast, those who came to the table during the *Inspiring Education* process came not as "knowers" but as "listeners and learners." And the overarching question was not "How can we fix parts of the present system" but "What does our education system need to look like in 2030 to respond to the needs of those children born today?"

The public was engaged in many ways, via personal, local and regional conversations, a provincial forum and ongoing online conversations. Participants were chosen for the 14 regional conversations in thirds: one third invited stakeholders, one third community leaders and one third of individuals who had applied to attend were chosen randomly. Efforts were undertaken to engage those who would not normally come forward, such as youth living on the street. Each form of engagement was moderated by a trained facilitator whose task was to ensure that the conversation was in the form of a generative dialogue, focused on the future. Parallel conversations from the student Speak Out and Setting the Direction dialogues were also shared with the steering committee.

Generative Dialogue

In his article "Changing the World by Changing How We Talk and Listen,"² Adam Kahane describes how, over a period of 20 years, he used generative dialogue to help solve deeply rooted conflicts in many countries, such as Guatemala, Northern Ireland, South Africa and others. He suggests that, "When people from countries in conflict come together to work for change, they are trying to change their futures—change the world—not simply anticipate change and prepare for it." Kahane describes four ways of talking and listening: 1) downloading; 2) debating; 3) reflective dialogue; and 4) generative dialogue, which is the highest form. Using generative dialogue, individuals come to the table not as experts or knowers, but as listeners and learners. Through conversation that is marked by listening to understand, patience for ambiguity and the purposeful absence of debate, Kehane suggests, "In a generative dialogue it is as if meaning emerges not from any one person but from the centre of the circle."

During *Inspiring Education* many generative conversations were captured and a number of themes began to emerge regarding a vision for education in 2030. These themes were brought forward for discussion to the provincial forum in Edmonton, with its 1,400 invitees. It was clear from the survey done at the provincial forum that Albertans knew that the system we have is performing well but it will need to adapt to changing times. The survey indicated that a significant majority favoured an "informed transformation" of our system, one that recognizes present strengths but reflects a changing world of 21st century learning.

The Three E's

It was significant for the steering committee members—who were patient in examining information from conversations for an entire year—to see three main themes emerge, together with a vision that placed students at the centre: an engaged thinker and ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit. We heard from *Speak Out* forums that students did not always feel engaged in their own learning and that they wanted the opportunity to solve real-life problems. The *Inspiring Education* dialogues suggested that students needed a greater opportunity to think critically and creatively and to be recognized not just for what they know but also what they **can do.**

It was also apparent that Albertans wanted young people to be contributing members of their communities and society in general, to understand the significance of freedom and democracy, and what it means to live in and embrace a diverse society. This was echoed in the student *Speak Out* dialogues, where the priority of youth was to change the world, one relationship at a time, through their individual passions and actions.

It is important to note that "entrepreneurial spirit" is not the same as "entrepreneurism." A student with an entrepreneurial spirit is one who demonstrates confidence, resilience and perseverance and understands that when working critically and creatively to solve problems one may encounter adversity or failure and learn from these experiences.

Paradigm Shifts

It was clear from the information gathered from the various dialogues that there was a need to look at our education system and its component parts through a different lens.

Emerging principles described a system that is learner centred, shares responsibility and accountability for results, engages communities, provides inclusive and equitable access, provides a responsive and flexible approach to student learning, and supports the sustainable and efficient use of resources. The required shifts may be described as follows:

Student learning: Learning should be a demonstration of what one knows and can do. Has our system become increasingly focused on "what one knows?" We have heard from teachers that our curriculum has become so "packed" with outcomes that the time necessary for heightened student learning is compromised and they feel the need to "move on" to cover the curriculum. Themes emerging in Inspiring Education suggested an increased focus on the "can do" aspect of learning by describing the competencies that students should be able to demonstrate. These are best described as "21st century learning" competencies: thinking critically and creatively; solving complex problems; working in diverse teams; being able to communicate, manage information, demonstrate multiple literacies, and knowledge of self in their own learning styles and career aspirations.

Teaching: Although not specifically addressed as a "shift" in the *Inspiring Education* report, it was evident that the teaching/learning relationship was paramount. The view of a teacher not solely as



an "imparter of knowledge" but an "architect of learning" perhaps best describes this shift. We heard that the system needs to be aligned to limit the barriers of time, numerous curricular outcomes and excessive management-type reporting. It is my belief that the system needs to unleash the talent of our teachers in designing learning experiences that engage students, reflect real-life challenges and address the learning styles of individual students while meeting the expectations of the framework for learning.

Governance and System Leadership:

We heard that the system needs to be less focused on operational rules and policies and more focused on principles to guide the system. A further shift is away from centralization and accountability to bureaucracy toward a system that reflects local needs and provides adaptable forms of governance and leadership.

Policy Shifts: We heard from participants that policy which guides the system needs to shift from a system-centred approach to a learner-centred one, to be less



focused on content and more focused on building competencies and to use technology to support the creation and sharing of knowledge. We also heard that policy needed to reflect that not all learning and skill development takes place at school and that families, communities and business and industry need to be partners in the education system.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to describe the generative process practiced in the development of Inspiring Education: a Dialogue with Albertans³—a process that can be used in engaging communities in visioning. Being a member of the Inspiring Education steering committee was a privilege and, undoubtedly, the most significant personal growth opportunity that I have experienced. It is fitting that co-chair of the Steering Committee, Jeff Johnson, is now our Minister of Education and the passion he brings for this vision is evident. It's a vision we see reflected in the new Education Act. The challenge for all will be to move forward toward implementation, to identify barriers to progress and the supports required to transform our education system.

Senior education consultant Jim Gibbons joined the ASBA in June, 2010. He came from Chinook's Edge School Division, where he served as superintendent of schools for ten years. Gibbons is a past president of the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the Canadian Association of School Administrators.

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A Year of Engaged Teacher Learning in Wild Rose Public Schools: Start Where You Can

"My inspiration came from having a child who struggled and then knowing the importance of caring enough to make a difference for all students." - Cheryl Kalev, 2013

By Cheryl Kalev, Alexis Holstead and Tom Sperling

ild Rose Public Schools has been on a journey from teaching to learning over the past three years. As J. Hattie states in his pivotal meta-analysis, *Visible Teaching*, it is what teachers know, do and care about which is very powerful in the learning equation. (J. Hattie, 2008, *Visible Learning*). Wild Rose teachers have moved from professional learning communities to professional learning teams. And we have worked to change the way that professional learning for teachers is offered over the course of the school year.

Approximately 10 per cent of teacher days are devoted to professional learning either at the division, school or personal level, with a focused effort on engaging everyone in the ownership of their learning. This focus has led to increased leadership capacity with more input from teachers and the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA). We have seen an increase in teacher collaboration, side by side teaching and deep understanding being built for teachers, *by teachers*.

The following timeline demonstrates our transformation from a teaching division to a learning division by following one teacher through a year of professional learning.

Cheryl Kalev is a Grade 2 teacher at Lochearn School in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. She has been

a member of the Lochearn Team for two years. She is presently enrolled as a Masters student in Educational Leadership at the University of Alberta. Front loaded Professional Learning has been part of the culture of Wild Rose for many years, using August days for professional learning. During the past three years, teachers have increased their collaboration time by using embedded time, scheduled by school administrators, or collaborating when administrators bring in substitute teachers so grade level or subject level teachers may work together. As well, teachers who own their learning engage in learning conversations throughout their school days. Cheryl is a member of the Grade 2/3 team at Lochearn who meet weekly to move forward their teaching practice. Their team goals are:

- Meaningful and authentic work;
- Provide support for one another;
- Data from student work is at the forefront of their conversations;
- Developing student exemplars; and
- Sharing positive success stories.

In 2012-2013, Cheryl's year began like many of her colleagues. She used her summer to attend a conference where she reflected on the power and responsibility of teachers to work towards making significant changes in student learning.

August 27: The first teacher directed day of the school year found Cheryl planning and preparing for a presentation she was making to colleagues from across the division. Her topic was Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century. It was also a day for her to develop her professional growth plan for the year.

August 28: The first division directed day of the year had Cheryl presenting at the Ed Café, hosted by Lochearn School (http://edcafe.weebly.com). "I hadn't realized what a gratifying experience that day would turn out to be. It was a day I had been very nervous about but I am so thankful that I took the opportunity to do it," said Cheryl.

August 29: The second division directed day for 2012-2013 was spent working alongside other teachers inquiring about the Daily Five Language program, how she could begin to use Action Research in her classroom, thinking about digital storytelling, the inquiry classroom and 2.0 tools with her class.

August 30: On the Division start-up day staff gathered to meet the Board Chairperson and Superintendent and later Cheryl had time to work in her classroom.

August 31: A school directed day and Cheryl had time to work with other teachers in her school, focusing on Action Research. She shared ideas from colleagues across the division. Once the student school year started, the Grade 2/3 learning team was scheduled embedded time by their principal and they began the regular meetings described previously.

September 21: Cheryl worked with another grade level team member to develop an inquiry into her community focusing on learning that is authentic and engaging during this school directed professional learning day. Cheryl's team looked at the Grade 3 PAT results and identified what the team would focus on for the upcoming year. They also worked on web 2.0 tools.

October 22, 23 and 24: Cheryl was one of 16 Wild Rose teachers who attended the Buck Institute Conference in Red Deer. This three day event is supported centrally by the Division Education Centre. This institute provided support for our teachers working on inquiry.

October 26: On this division directed day, Cheryl drove 110 kilometres to work with Nikos Theodosakis on authentic learning and thinking about, "How to make a difference in this world in my own classroom." Over 40 colleagues attended with her.



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November 22: Another division directed day saw Cheryl hosting 20 teachers from across schools, helping them to develop an inquiry project. The best part of the day was that it was more of a conversation than a session. "I think teachers are realizing that everyone has knowledge and ideas that help others," stated Cheryl.

November 23: On this school based day, most teachers took what they learned on November 22 and brought it into their classrooms. Cheryl visited the Calgary Science School and asked difficult questions and received astute and honest answers. The Science school is hosting the ConnectEd Canada conference in May 2013, which Cheryl is planning to attend.

December 7: This was Wild Rose's first ATA Professional Learning day. It was a day designed to have ATA members provide sessions and also the opportunity for working on professional growth plan goals. Cheryl decided she needed to know more about using data in her action research and used the day to investigate the topic.

February 1: This was a school directed day that also served as a turnaround for high

schools beginning semester two. Cheryl's school had teachers sharing inquiry projects they have been working on, going deeper with their understanding of strategies to strengthen student intellectual engagement.

March 8: This is the last division directed day of the year. Cheryl will be attending a session hosted by an administrator from Westwinds School Division, KathyOviatt-Petrunik, on inquiry. The day will also allow time for grade level teams to work together on their projects.

April 19: A school directed day where teachers at Lochearn will work with their principal, Danielle Spencer, on their individual inquiries, SmartLearning strategies and inquiry learning.

May 3: This is a school directed day where Cheryl will work with her team on creating sequences and inquiry-based learning projects.

June 7: On this school directed day teachers at Lochearn will be bringing evidence of learning forward in all areas, demonstrating that what we are doing is making an impact on student learning.

Cheryl is representative of the professional teachers in Wild Rose who learn alongside their students. As she said, "It is a WONDERful way to work."

Working in a school where administrators value professional learning, where the culture is one of honoring the collective knowledge and learning from each other and ultimately doing what is best for students, is the essence of professional learning in Wild Rose Public Schools. Administrators must see themselves as learners growing with their teachers. When administrators value professional learning good things happen.

"Don't wait until everything is just right. It will never be perfect. There will always be challenges, obstacles and less than perfect conditions. So what? Get started now." - Mark Victor Hansen

By Cheryl Kalev is a teacher in the Wild Rose Public School system. Alexis Holstead is the Director of Instruction. Tom Sperling is Associate Superintendent, Learning Services.

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The Team Leadership Academy began in 2009 as a CASS Moving and Improving event. Teams of educational leaders come together to develop organizational plans while engaging outside experts in the area of leadership and educational change. The purpose is to engage these experts while addressing organizational planning for the future. Participants are teams of people for school jurisdictions, government, consortia and other organizations who serve the education sector.



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A Grade 1 student articulates her learning strategies.



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A Grade 1 student reflects on his learning.

Iris: Transformation in Practice

By Dr. Ronna Mosher, Alison Boyd and Erica Rae

he Calgary Board of Education (CBE) recently launched a webbased learning platform, Iris, to support and promote integrated ways of attending to student learning needs, what and how students are taught, and how research can be integrated within these practices.¹ This article highlights schoolbased experiences that demonstrate the transformation of education in action.

Iris promotes integrated ways of attending to student learning. It offers a space for teachers, students and instructional leaders to explore new ways to engage together and makes the work of student, teacher and leader visible. Iris opens teaching and learning traditions to new possibilities.

The four components of Iris—the learning plan, learner profile, workspace and resource library—support teachers' decisions about what and how to teach and students' decisions about what and how to learn. Taking direction from Richard Elmore's instructional core². Iris offers multiple and integrated points of influence on teaching and learning: student, teacher, content, task and assessment.

How schools use Iris varies in response to their context. *Why* they use it, however, is common—to improve the practices of inclusive personalized learning that impact student achievement. Iris cannot change pedagogy on its own; but as an application founded on and combined with systemic commitments to effective teaching and learning practices, Iris helps interrupt the habits of traditional pedagogical paradigms and helps provoke new and richer practices.

Every student needs to be known and there are things worth knowing about each student

Learning plans create opportunities for students to develop and share self-understandings. Learner profiles capture the formative assessment information.

Learning plans provide a venue for students to consider what they know about themselves as learners, to set goals and to develop strategies for achieving those goals. As students select and reflect on artifacts of learning and engage in conversation with their teachers about what they know and can do, the relationship between teacher/student/content shifts and students become increasingly metacognitive about their learning.

Bea, a Grade 5 student said, "I like using Iris because I can have a conversation with myself." Classmate Fahid, explains, "People are shy or embarrassed to tell their gifts. But they might have good gifts, they might have trouble with emotions, but sharing makes us stronger and Iris let's us express ourselves in our learning."

Learner profiles are a gathering point for teachers; they are a space in which to gather collective professional insight and wisdom. Formative assessment information gathered through daily classroom interactions, conversations with students and families, and specialized assessments make up the learner profile. Teachers build common understandings of what students know and can do in a variety of contexts and use that information to determine appropriate instructional responses. As silos of teaching practice fall, a community of teacher learners emerges. Gurmit, a Grade 6 teacher, commented, "Every time I enter something into a student's learner profile, I find I'm stopping and asking, 'What am I actually assessing? Where is it in the Program of Studies? What will I do with it after I write it down?"

There are implications for students, teachers and leaders based on what is known

Workspaces provide a venue for integrating information about each component of the instructional core.

Iris workspaces offer teachers a place to bring together critical information about students, teaching and content to design assessment and instruction. What is known about each learner can be held up alongside what current research says about effective instructional practices as well as with resources that support a rich understanding of the content being taught. Teachers use workspaces as personal and collaborative spaces; they have become "go to" places for developing understandings of particular students or groups of students, for exploring new instructional methodologies, or for accessing the expertise of their colleagues. Schools are using workspaces to replace existing site-based processes as they rethink how things are done around here.

CBE school leaders are working to strategically connect research, school based data, and system and provincial perspectives to actively engage in learning as a leadership practice. Iris brings focus to this work and calls upon the various aspects of leading a school. CBE administrators have skillfully aligned the purpose of Iris to support their School Development Plans. Engaging in conversation about learning artifacts and aspects of learner profiles allows leaders insight to their work in leading the professional growth of teachers.

What is known in one context cannot be lost in another

Learning plans and learner profiles provide continuity for transitions from one class to another, one grade to another and one school to another.

Learning plans and profiles connect students with their teachers and instructional leaders within the school. This allows students, their strengths, successful learning strategies and areas of growth to be known within specific courses and across disciplines. Teaching and learning relationships are developing more stable, integrated qualities as insights are shared within the community of teachers and learners.

A student who recently transitioned from a specialized setting to a community school expressed the significance of her learning plan in that process. She was able to confidently share her goals for completing high school and strategies to support her in successfully doing so with her new school. She proudly shared and spoke to learning artifacts that demonstrated her passions, skills and success as a learner.

Combined with recent formative assessments, learning and social/emotional conditions for success, and key understandings developed by her previous teachers within the learner profile, a potentially stressful and tenuous transition felt less so—for the student and her support team. Iris provided a starting point for new understanding, new relationships and new conversations about teaching and learning throughout this transition; no one felt they were starting from scratch.

The Calgary Board of Education believes in educating each student, every day, without exception. As we continue to bump up against what has been and what we believe could be for each student, Iris will provide students, teachers and leaders a place to consider, learn and grow.

Dr. Ronna Mosher is a Director in the Office of the Chief Superintendent of the Calgary Board of Education and leads the vision, development and integration of Iris. Alison Boyd and Erica Rae are Specialists in Assessment and Instruction within the Calgary Board of Education. Their work centers on supporting schools with the integration of Iris into their teaching and learning practices.

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Mobile Learning in K-12:

From Content Expert to Facilitator of Learning





ABOVE: Elementary students in Athabasca and Beijing are using mobile technology to communicate with one another as part of their daily class routine.

By Dermod Madden

obile learning is a term synonymous with change in the K-12 public education system in Alberta; a change from traditional pedagogies of exclusion to a philosophy which embraces inclusive practice. The implications of such fundamental change are significant. Of utmost importance is the need to change teacher practice from that of content expert



to that of facilitator of the learning. Mobile learning within a blended learning environment can assist this process and, in so doing, affect significant change to teaching practice and student learning.

Mobile learning can be defined within a variety of social and geopolitical contexts, which are time dependent and ever-changing. Continuous improvements in technology, in conjunction with the increasing ubiquity of mobile devices, are conducive to an environment that supports anywhere, anytime learning.

Whereas mobile technologies have the potential to provide a basic level of service for those areas of the developing world where access to education is minimal or non-existent; these same technologies have the added



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potential of enhancing existing educational supports and services in the so-called developed world, where access to education is a right.

As a source of technology, mobile devices are useful only to the extent that they assist in facilitating the learning process. However, just having mobile devices is not enough. Thirty years of standalone computer labs in North American schools has demonstrated that simply handing out technological devices in schools is no guarantee that teaching practices will change. It is important to determine the value of mobile technologies and the extent to which these technologies can support inclusive practice.

It is with this in mind that Aspen View Regional Division No.19 is piloting a number of mobile/blended learning projects to determine whether or not there is utility for ubiquitous learning, within a K-12 system in rural Alberta. Access to computer technology has been readily available since the early 1980s, although evidence of ubiquitous learning at the classroom level is not the norm. Part of the issue is that new technology is often introduced without a clear understanding of its utility or potential. Often, it seems that just having the technology is sufficient and its value is determined by the degree to which it can accommodate existing teacher practice and pedagogical beliefs.

In addition, high degrees of provincial accountability and summative assessment practices, in the form of provincial achievement tests in Grades 3, 6 and 9, and provincial diploma exams in Grade 12, encourage practices which are teacher directed, with a focus on content and summative evaluations.

The fact is, however, that ubiquitous social networking is a reality, especially for our students. The advantages of incorporating social networking practices within the classroom are that they create opportunities for educators to engage students in inclusive learning environments, wherein the design of the learning requires a degree of student autonomy that is usually absent in traditional classroom settings. Mobile learning within the context of a K-12 education system in Alberta implies blended learning environments. The term "blended learning" refers to a combination of traditional classroom processes and online or virtual learning processes.

Online learning is, by design, learner and process focused and requires student to student interaction and student to teacher interaction, (Greener, 2008). Such a learning environment requires the flexibility to function within the traditional classroom setting and incorporate an online or virtual component. Blended learning can also be defined as a combination of traditional classroom processes and online or virtual learning processes. If properly implemented, blended learning can accommodate singular learning processes as well as interactive, interdisciplinary collaborative learning processes, both online and in the regular classroom setting. A blended learning environment can also provide students the flexibility to access education in several learning environments. This may include, but is not confined to, regular classroom instruction, synchronous and asynchronous online platforms such as Moodle, Elluminate and Adobe Connect, as well as video-conferencing and formatted online learning environments that support inclusive practice.

Alberta Education's *Setting the Direction* framework recommends the development of an inclusive framework that supports the needs of all students. Inclusive education acknowledges the needs and the rights of the individual learner and is premised on the philosophical belief that all students belong and that all students must feel valued, welcomed and respected as individuals and members of an educational community. Inclusion as a global philosophy is one which focuses on the education of every student.

An evaluation of teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions regarding inclusion is central to developing and promoting an inclusive school culture, because teachers are the key implementers of inclusive practices within the learning environment (Kern, 2006). The literature indicates that overall, teachers believe in the concept of inclusion but feel they lack the supports needed to effectively carry it out (Katz, 2012; Porter, 2008). Positive attitudes towards inclusion are amongst the strongest predictors of the success of inclusive reforms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin, 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Mastopieri & Scruggs, 2007).

It is with this in mind that Aspen View has embarked on a series of mobile learning projects across the division. Beginning in September 2012, teachers who were interested in incorporating inclusive practices, such as authentic learning, cognitive apprenticeship, cognitive scaffolding, generative learning, constructivist pedagogy, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, and situated learning, were provided with mobile devices to be used by their students. To date, there are seven projects ongoing at various grade levels and with an eighth project due to commence in March 2013.

The range of subjects and grades is extensive and includes elementary, junior high and high school, as well as both English and French Immersion programs. To date, the data collection has been exclusively qualitative. Teachers and students are learning together as they move forward. The intent of this project has been to provide a supportive environment for teachers to incorporate new technologies and new methodologies that promote the development of information and communications technology (ICT) skills amongst staff, students and parents. Already, after only five months, we have seen changes in practice that are reflective of authentic learning, cooperative learning and constructivist pedagogy. Perhaps what is most encouraging is the subtle change in the relationship between the student and the teacher. New working relationships are developing which appear to support inclusive practice.

One of the classes involved in the project is engaged in a partnership with He Ping Li No.9 School in Beijing, China. Elementary students in Athabasca and Beijing are now using mobile technology to communicate with one another as part of their daily class routine. The data from these pilots may provide direction for future promising practices in rural public education in Alberta.

Dermod Madden is the Associate-Superintendent for Aspen View Regional division No.19 in Athabasca, Alberta.

For a full list of references, please email Editor-in-Chief Shannon Savory at ssavory@ matrixgroupinc.net.

Inspiring Transformation of Practices through Critical, Participatory Action Research: Students as Agents of Change

By Rhonda Nixon and David Warawa



Spring 2013 • The CASS Connection

lberta Education's (2011a) Action Agenda is "To chang[e] the education system by re-examining student needs, how we teach students, what we teach them, how to better engage communities in educating students and how research can be harnessed to inform change" (p.4). We embraced this agenda in AISI Cycle V by creating conditions in schools for students to develop as agents of change.

By being agents of change, students have been integral in shaping innovative curricular and extracurricular opportunities to grow as socially, culturally, globally and environmentally responsible citizens and lifelong learners who are committed to healthy living (Alberta Education, 2011b). This shift from teacher- to learner-centered pedagogies has encouraged a reexamination of traditional practices and inspired innovation in our schools—"Innovation is about doing the same job in a fundamentally different way" (Hargreaves, 2013).

Archbishop Oscar Romero: A "Telling Case" of Transformation Through CPAR

In the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD) each school received \$12,500 to create opportunities for students to be agents of change through critical participatory action research (CPAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). CPAR happens when a community engages in a collaborative and reciprocal process of identifying problems, planning for a change and collecting and reflecting on data as change unfolds. The rest of this article After reviewing focus group data, which indicated that students lacked awareness of social issues, she decided to involve students in choosing a social issue of importance to them and taking a greater role in planning and producing the show.

describes a "telling case" (Mishler, 1986) of one high school's journey in CPAR.

Archbishop Oscar Romero High School is a new school community (eight years old) of 550 students and 42 staff. Five lead teachers wrote action plans to change their practice based on student, staff and parent input. Here we will outline their planning process, which illuminates Hargreaves' (2013) criteria for shifting educational systems towards innovation and improvement: inspiration, improvement, innovation, inquiry and inclusion.

Inspiration through appreciative inquiry: In September, the teachers discussed what it meant for students to develop as socially, culturally, environmentally responsible and healthy citizens. They presented their current practices that created conditions for students to be agents of change. This appreciative inquiry process highlighted how they supported students to be engaged, ethical citizens, but they also recognized that they could improve students' levels of involvement in such opportunities.

Improvement by reexamining practices: In October, the principal (second author) suggested that the staff reflect on students' and parents' perspectives on current practices. District staff conducted student focus groups with approximately 15 per cent of a random sample of Grades 10 to 12 students. One student in each group of four to five students recorded answers to questions such as: What helps you to be engaged in school? and What gets in the way of you being engaged in school? The parents and staff answered parallel questions. Based on this data, teachers noted that students required more: multimodal (print, visual, digital) ways of learning; strategies to effect change in their own lives (to balance work-school, to manage stress, to set and meet goals); and exposure to local and global issues of importance. Reflecting on this information enabled staff to reexamine current practices from multiple perspectives and to consider how to change them.

Innovation by listening to student voice: Five teachers chose to write action plans and they took seriously the student focus group feedback. They reshaped their original projects to increase student involvement in the planning process. Two science teachers wrote

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a project to improve recycling practices in school. After reviewing focus group data, which showed that students were interested in learning about environmental stewardship and knew little about such issues, they involved students in: surveying students, staff and parents about their knowledge of recycling; providing input into the budget; and planning how to raise awareness of local and global communities about recycling.

A second example is the Physical Education Department Head wrote an action plan to provide students with non-competitive fitness opportunities in school. She explained, "The focus group data shows that the students are relatively unaware that physical fitness is a social problem." Therefore, she chose to involve students in learning about the issue of youth inactivity and raising awareness about it.

A third example is the Fashions Study teacher wrote an action plan to put on a fashion show to raise monies for issues of importance. She acknowledged that she had done this fashion show in the past and students often got involved in it for the wrong reasons



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(wanting to model). After reviewing focus group data, which indicated that students lacked awareness of social issues, she decided to involve students in choosing a social issue of importance to them and taking a greater role in planning and producing the show.

Finally, the principal's interest in opening up diverse learning models within the school and confirmatory evidence of the need for such models in the student focus group data (e.g., students wanted more control over pacing course work), resulted in a pilot study of self-directed learning for English 10 students.

These four action plans began with teacher voice but as teachers listened to student voice, they developed more innovative, student-centered projects.

Inquiry through risk-taking: The principal noted, "I turned over \$12,500 to teachers and students to shape projects around issues of importance to them. I used the picture book, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (2003) to reinforce that not everyone has to lead a project but everyone has to be willing to get on the bus with our lead teachers and students." He developed a culture of inquiry by trusting teachers and students to take risks to engage in teaching and learning differently; he let go of control over how they planned for such changes.

Inclusion through diversity: The principal emphasized that student focus groups represented the diversity (gender, culture, special needs) of their student population. He explained that this data pushed staff to reexamine their practices based on the voices of *all* students.

Conclusion

In AISI Cycle V, we have re-examined practices and harnessed the power of research to change from teacher- to student-centered pedagogies within schools. Archbishop Oscar Romero High School is one "telling case" amongst many other emerging ones in our district.

Rhonda Nixon, PhD, is the AISI Lead Researcher. David Warawa is Principal of Archbishop Oscar Romero High School.

For a full list of references, please email Editor-in-Chief Shannon Savory at ssavory@ matrixgroupinc.net.







The College of Alberta School Superintendents

A District Inspired for Education Transformation

By Catherine Coyne

L. Albert Public Schools is a suburban district that has always had its eye on the future. Recent shifts in funding models, ongoing dialogue about developing a district focus in a strong site-based system and the beginning of a new cycle of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) coalesced to create conditions to transform how our district supports students and staff in their learning. The beginning of this process has already illuminated opportunities and challenges in the transformation, and reinforced our commitment to work collaboratively to address the needs of our learners.

Though we did not know it at the time, we began our transformative conversations at the CASS Leadership Academy in 2009. The result of our initial conversations was the development of the Central Office Learning Team, fondly known as COLT. This group includes members of central office, including senior administration and the directors, supervisors and coordinators of the various service areas. The fundamental principle of all COLT conversations is "*How can we best support principals and assistant principals as our district instructional leaders*?" This dialogue allowed often disparate service areas to gain a broader view of the needs of those we serve.

These conversations, however, did not include those that COLT sought to provide support. As a result, our Superintendent created a *Leadership for Learning* seminar series for all members of our Council of Administrators (Admin Council), comprising of principals, assistant principals and district office staff. Three times during the school year this group of over 40 district leaders met and discussed issues surrounding The beginning of this process has already illuminated opportunities and challenges in the transformation, and reinforced our commitment to work collaboratively to address the needs of our learners.

leadership, assessment, and, most recently, teacher growth, supervision and evaluation. A sense of common purpose and common understanding arose from these conversations, something that can, at times, be challenging in a district with a strong site-based philosophy.

Parallel to district conversations about leadership and learning were conversations about the need to support the development of strong student literacy skills. Though our district had focused the first cycle of AISI on implementing Grades 1 through 3 balanced literacy, we were beginning to see fragmentation of implementation, resulting from a lack of sustained retraining and formal support.

Through feedback from a variety of stakeholders, the superintendent decided to commit a significant sum of funds to creating a literacy project. Influenced by the philosophy of balanced literacy, Response to Invention and Universal Design for Learning, a project was developed for phased implementation to not only support primary literacy but also to support upper elementary and junior high literacy development. In January to June 2012, the first phase of this plan was put in action with over 90 district primary teachers.

During the implementation of the first phase of the literacy project, our district

began exploring the direction for our Cycle 5 AISI project. Enthusiasm for the literacy project infused conversations about literacy. In particular, teachers in grades typically ignored by explicit literacy professional development were vocal in their desire to gain the resources and skills to better meet the needs of struggling readers in their classrooms. As a result, our district decided to create an AISI project that focuses solely on providing support for enhancing instructional practices through a comprehensive approach to literacy in Grades 4 to 9.

In retrospect, the transformative process in St. Albert Public Schools has been underway for several years; however, we believe we are merely at the beginning of the process. We are celebrating our early successes with the recognition of the need for enhancing literacy in a high performing district, engagement and enthusiasm. We are also working through the challenges that come with a focused project in a district with a strong sitebased philosophy, the need to shift existing practices in light of the heightened need for collaboration and the patience to implement with fidelity. Yet, even at these early stages in the transformative process, it would be difficult to turn back because we are already able to see the power of change.

Changing Practices: Implementing a School Psychology Services Model in Peace River School Division

By Janet Mayer and Dr. Coranne Johnson

any Alberta school divisions acknowledged a need to work differently and provide a more responsive model of supports and services as a result of the Severe Disabilities Profile Review (2007). Furthermore, the Setting the Direction initiative articulated a clear mandate that an inclusive model of education be developed focusing on capacity building, collaboration and curriculum. The Inspiring Action on Education document (June 2010) challenged educators to "think and work differently." To that end, Peace River School Division (PRSD) began the journey of creating a more collaborative means of supporting students and building capacity.

Dr. R. Coranne Johnson, registered psychologist (school and clinical) was looking for an opportunity to implement the findings from her dissertation. Through interviews with both teachers and school psychologists, she found a need for the provision of a broad spectrum of school psychology services (beyond assessment) in Alberta schools. Dr. Johnson is a former PRSD student and teacher. When her ties to the division came to the attention of PRSD Supervisor of Student Services, Janet Mayer, an opportunity became apparent. With the support of senior executives and the Board of Trustees, a partnership was formed, and a new way of providing services began.

The School Psychology Services Model (SPSM) is based on reciprocal communication, ongoing support, teamwork and capacity building. It includes universal, targeted and specialized strategies that focus on student strengths using a team-based approach with input from educators, parents and community partners. In year one, implementation focused on building relationships and introducing a new way of supporting students. There were challenges but many educators welcomed a new way of working, valuing the productivity and practicality of the services provided.

The model continued to gain traction over the next three years as the demand





for school psychology services increased. The school psychologist became a regular member of the Divisional Learning Support Team (supervisors, coaches, coordinators, consultants). This team works collaboratively to provide school-based supports by utilizing each other's strengths and expertise. The use of evidence-based practices is apparent as educators implement structures that facilitate assessment and planning for students' needs. Now in its fifth year, the SPSM continues to evolve as demonstrated by growth of student support capacity amongst educators.

There are many benefits to the SPSM as it reflects the principles of an inclusive education system. It provides direct contact with educators, students and their families. The key benefit within this model is the focus on developing academic and behavioural programming that reflects the strengths and needs of students. Another aspect of this model is the coordination of community supports for students. To that end, PRSD facilitated regular meetings between Dr. Johnson and the local child and adolescent psychiatrist and other mental health professionals. This helps with communication between school, home and partnering agencies, thus providing an avenue to facilitate timely and complementary services. Additionally, PRSD has continued to build capacity with administrators, teachers, educational assistants, and parents through many professional learning sessions provided by the school psychologist in this model.

Any student can be referred by the School Learning Team when there is a need. These referrals are coordinated by school-based Inclusive Education Coaches (I-Coaches) and sent to Student Services consultant, Kathy Budd; the single intake point. Priorities are collectively established and a schedule is developed. Scheduling is an important part of the model, requiring time, patience, negotiation and perseverance.

PRSD has contracted school psychology services for 16 weeks this year. Between visits, school-based I-Coaches partner with classroom teachers to implement programming plans. Schools can access Dr. Johnson when she is out of the division to assist with problem solving via various technological means.

The effectiveness of this model is based on the work of educators at all levels. Peace River School Division is strategically planning for capacity building to ensure sustainability of the School Psychology Services Model.

Janet Mayer is Supervisor of Student Services for the Peace River School Division.

Dr. R. Coranne Johnson, R. Psych., is presently working in private practice and is serving as the Co-Chair of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta – School Psychology Committee. She can be contacted through her website, www.helpingchildren.ca.

Transforming Education through Project-Based Learning

By Brenda MacDonald

or over 100 years educators, such as John Dewey, have reported on the benefits of experience-based forms of learning. To survive in today's world, children can no longer passively learn facts and render them out of context. Solving the highly complex problems evident in project-based learning requires that students have both basic skills (reading, writing, and math) and 21st century skills (collaborating, problem solving, research gathering, effective communicating and employing tech tools). With this combination of skills, students become creators and managers of their learning.

A focus on "transforming education in Alberta" has resulted in research into new ways of learning, new approaches to teaching and a restructuring of curriculum. Red Deer Catholic Regional schools are conducting an action research on project-based learning within the context of a new and draft program of studies. The research was to observe whether students engaged in project-based learning (PBL) achieved the various competencies and skills needed to become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Through complex questions and carefully designed products and tasks, students engage in learning knowledge and skills. Project-based learning is a systematic teaching method. PBL brings relevance and a real life context to the curriculum. Students work together but also become independent workers, critical thinkers and risk takers. This combination of strategic planning by the teachers and completion of these authentic projects has students excited about school and learning.

In the Red Deer Catholic research, teachers have witnessed increased student engagement

Teachers have observed increased student motivation, collaboration skills, ownership, pride and quality of work. These student successes have empowered Red Deer Catholic teachers to become more innovative, passionate and positive about teaching.

and leadership skills develop. In addition, teachers have also observed increased student motivation, collaboration skills, ownership, pride and quality of work. These student successes have empowered Red Deer Catholic teachers to become more innovative, passionate and positive about teaching.

Technology ultimately supported student engagement, innovation and discovery and the development of lifelong learning skills. The use of technology enabled students to reach beyond the physical school building. Students seemed more engaged in their learning when projects were authentic and were outside the context of school. Students become engaged builders and sharers of knowledge, traits that are not often recognized as beneficial in a traditional classroom. Teachers discovered that when student are able to demonstrate their personal strengths and interests in what they are learning, that the student achieved at a higher level. In properly designed projects, technology was the catalyst for students taking ownership of their own learning.

Teachers believed that professional development and structures that allowed for regular exchange of ideas and best practices, as well as time to work and collaborate, were essential. For the past year and half, 16 teachers in eight schools received one FTE release time, regularly scheduled collaboration time and district support. In addition, teachers in Red Deer Catholic received five days of project-based learning professional development, which included designing, planning and implementing successful projects. There were follow-up sessions on assessment and PBL structures. To further support implementation, school administrators also received PBL training.

There is unanimous agreement from teachers and administrators that their training was pivotal to the success of the work they are doing. Teachers and school administrators working together on alternative teaching approaches to ensure that children are developing competencies and skills needed to be successful educated Albertans.

In Red Deer Catholic, we have discovered that good projects in classrooms encourage change in the culture and structure of schools. Schools continue to strive for excellence, change climate and improve student learning. Project-based learning contributed significantly to this process by encouraging teacher collaboration, motivating students to achieve, using the tools and language of project management and organizational change. In particular, project-based learning has transformed the way Red Deer Catholic is thinking about possible learning experiences and the way we address learning needs of tomorrow.

Brenda MacDonald is the Curriculum Coordinator for Red Deer Catholic and Project lead for the CTF and Competencies Prototype Project.

Write Across the Middle: A Literacy Initiative Influencing Middle Schools

By Jenny Davidson

where the second students with a passion for writing to keep doing what they love. WATM provides an encouraging and safe environment where all middle school students are welcome to participate and also provides students with the opportunity to interact with the larger community of readers and writers from participating schools and around the world who have a common interest in literacy.

I created WATM as a way to share the raw and passion-driven student writing I experience everyday as a classroom teacher and to build a global community with a main focus on promoting and honoring literacy. I also created WATM for students. My rationale for WATM is comparable to how sports teams offer students an outlet to interact with peers and develop skills pertinent to a hobby they enjoy, wherein WATM gives students the opportunity to regularly write for others and/ or read the writings of other middle school students because it is something they enjoy and feel passionate about.

In addition to this, WATM exposes students to different writing styles of peers their own age, gives family and friends a chance to get involved and offer praise, aids in developing reading and writing skills, boosts confidence, delivers an authentic audience, provides support to writers and establishes meaningful connections.

WATM was founded in January 2012. The initiative started with New Brunswick middle schools but now encompasses middle schools in New Brunswick and Alberta with plans to connect with more schools this year both nationally and internationally. Over the past year, WATM has received nearly 200 submissions from middle school writers. These submissions have been viewed by people all over the world and have generated just over 13,000 views with nearly 350 comments posted to student writing.

The biggest piece of community building with WATM comes from the comments posted to student writing and the replies composed by writers. Writers have the ability to keep themselves

connected at all times by opting for e-mail notifications when comments are posted to their writing; similarly, commentators can also choose to be notified of follow-up comments via e-mail to stay connected and continue networking with writers. All comments and replies are held for moderation and reviewed by myself and a group of volunteer educators prior to being posted publically; the same is done for all submissions of writing made to WATM ensuring that posts are appropriate in content and that all personal information is omitted.

Comments posted to student work have been very positive, insightful and well received by the writers. Examples of comments from the website include: "I love the way you write. It is deep and has meaning and is presented in a beautiful way. You have a gift so keep writing"; "This poem is amazing. I literally had tears in my eyes"; "Perhaps you could improve your spelling and add more descriptive language to engage readers more"; and, "Why do you



have to leave me in such suspense? I want to hear more about your story! It's so interesting!" And examples of replies include: "It makes me happy to know I might have made someone smile with my writing"; "I really appreciate the suggestions to improve my writing"; and, "I have the second part posted on here as well if you are interested in reading more!"

My goal for WATM is to foster growth in literacy skills and form a growing global community of middle school readers and writers. Schools interested in offering this opportunity to their students can peruse the WATM website at www.writeacrossthemiddle.wordpress. com and contact me at writeacrossthemiddle@ gmail.com.

Jenny Davidson is the founder and editor of Write Across the Middle. She earned her education degree at St. Thomas University in New Brunswick and is a Grade 6 teacher at the Calgary Girk' School in Alberta.

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Healthy People, Healthy Workplace News

The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by ten Trustees—five from the Alberta Teachers' Association and five from the Alberta School Boards Association. ASEBP offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for over 54,000 covered members in almost 60 school jurisdictions across the province. Working with the education sector has provided many insights and opportunities for growth that they are pleased to share in their regular column in CASS Connection.



The Gap Between Knowledge and Behavior: Medication Adherence

By Jennifer Carson, B.B.A.

o effectively transform behaviour, an understanding of the "landing place" is necessary. Otherwise, as they say, "Any ol' road will do." This could not be truer in understanding the complex environment of medication adherence—or more to the point—medication non-adherence. The rate of non-adherence in proper consumption of medication is alarming. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the rate to be at 50 per cent of the population in developed countries, even more in developing ones.

So, why is this something we need to address? Recently ASEBP contracted a nationally recognized company to analyze its prescription drug data from the past three years. The data was adjusted at ASEBP to remove any personally identifiable information prior to the study. Adherence, for purposes of this study, was measured where the member had filled the prescription drug claims The high incidence of medication nonadherence and the cost impacts are staggering. Not only is the medication wasted if not taken or taken improperly, often the strain of the disease worsens and can lead to poor productivity, accidents, absenteeism, sick leave, disability and even death.

consistently and continuously throughout the analysis period.

In an analysis of diabetes drug claims, 43.6 per cent of members claiming in this category were found to be non-adherent with their diabetes medications. Members claiming for diabetes drug products make up only 4.2 per cent of the total plan membership, yet they account for 15.7 per cent (\$6.6 million) of the total prescription drug spend. In a similar analysis focusing on depression drugs, 45 per cent of members claiming in this category were found to be non-adherent. These findings align with the WHO estimate, and have screamed that action is required.

The high incidence of medication nonadherence and the cost impacts are staggering. Not only is the medication wasted if not taken or taken improperly, often the strain of the disease worsens and can lead to poor productivity, accidents, absenteeism,



sick leave, disability and even death. A pattern exists where members not adhering to a prescribed medication regime are also found to not be compliant for the majority of their medication.

For many, the thought of a well-managed benefits plan means containing or reducing costs by conducting data analysis, understanding trends, establishing solid predictive modeling and communicating findings. However, these activities are but the lead-up to what is really necessary to transform behaviour. We are now able to truly identify a significant cost issue with the data—the solution is not quite as simple. The barriers can be many and are interrelated.

So, why do we do the things we do, or don't do the things we should do, to improve our chances of a healthier life? And whose responsibility is it to ensure medication adherence improves? Simply put, it's a shared responsibility. And that is the start to defining that landing place.

I marveled at a question posed to a presenter at a national health conference in February. The presenter was from a major Canadian insurance company. An employer in the audience asked if the presenter's company had done everything it could to provide effective health and wellness communication to its members. Lost to this questioner was the notion that the employer had a role as well, no, a responsibility, to set the tone and lead by example. Fortunately, the quick-thinking presenter answered, "When asked by employers to support their health and wellness initiatives, we are more than happy to help out." So, in order for



communications to be successful, both parties must work as partners.

Solutions are indeed being explored. They include news articles, websites, mailouts and videos available to download. Packaging of multiple medications in easy-to-use bubble containers for daily doses (including corresponding dates and times) has proven effective. Drug manufacturing companies have gone so far as to insert wireless chips with light and sound in pill bottle lids to remind the patient. QR codes are placed on labels for easy scanning to the patient's smart phone. Even an app has been developed to alert the patient. However, these are not without related costs to administer.

So, what is the role of the employer? First is knowing this epidemic exists. Second is committing to partnerships with organizations like ASEBP and supporting initiatives that identify and remove barriers. And third, assisting in communicating solutions to the members.

It won't be simple or quick, but change has got to happen to transform the members' medication adherence through knowledge, education and support.

Jennifer Carson is the Executive Director/ Chief Executive Officer of ASEBP. She has worked in the health and benefits sector for 25 years. During her seven years at ASEBP, she has championed the organizational transformation from purely a benefits provider to a health services and benefits provider of choice. ASEBP was named one of Alberta's Top 60 Employers for 2013 and awarded the Premier's Award of Merit for Healthy Workplaces in 2012.



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Legal Brief

Lessons Learned from Amanda Todd's Tragedy

By Teresa Haykowsky, McLennan Ross, and Suzanne Lundrigan, Alberta School Boards Association

anadians have been riveted by the October 10, 2012, suicide of 15 year-old Amanda Todd following months of cyberbullying, which started after Amanda posted topless photos of herself. Shortly before she took her life, Amanda posted a YouTube video documenting her suffering. As reported by the CBC, YouTube initially pulled the video, but at the request of her family—who said the video will spark important conversations about cyber and social media bullying—reposted the video.

While in most instances, Amanda's death prompted an international outpouring of sympathy in the same venue where she had been so tortured, Canadians were shocked to learn, some persisted in tormenting Amanda in death. RCMP have since launched a criminal investigation. Amanda's death has also sparked renewed calls for an end to bullying. On October 15, 2012 MPs kicked off debate on whether to strike a committee to study a national anti-bullying strategy.

This case illustrates the exponentially damaging impact bullying has in a wired world. No longer confined to the playground or walk home, bullies can take to the web to pursue and torment their victims. For this reason, cyber bullying is unfortunately particularly insidious.

In June 2012, Ontario passed the *Accepting Schools Act*, which requires school boards and schools to prevent bullying, mete out tougher punishment for bullying and support students who want to promote understanding and respect for all. The Act came into effect this past fall and requires school boards and schools to:

- Work with the school community to develop a bullying prevention and intervention plan and make the plan public.
- Investigate any reported incident of bullying.



- Support students who have been bullied, who have witnessed bullying and who have bullied.
- Inform parents about bullying incidents involving their children and discuss the available supports.
- Support students who want to lead activities that promote understanding, acceptance and respect for all.
- Issue tougher consequences for bullying and hate-motivated actions—up to, and including, expulsion.

B.C. introduced its *Erase Bullying* strategy in June 2012 and dedicated \$2 million to train educators and others to recognize and address threats. In Alberta, school jurisdictions have their own codes of conduct. As reported here, the proposed *Education Act* will speak specifically to cyberbullying in schools. Schools implement policies and practices, including working with School Resource Officers and police, to deal with bullying at school.

As reported in the October Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)





education law newsletter *Vis-å-vis*, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in September 2012 that a 17 year-old student, known as A.B., could sue an Internet provider to reveal the identities of people who created a Facebook page full of humiliating personal details about her.

Referring to Nova Scotia's 2012 Task Force Report on online bullying, authored by Professor Wayne MacKay, the Supreme Court of Canada highlighted the following:

- It is logical to infer that children may suffer harm through cyber bullying. Such a conclusion is consistent with the psychological toxicity of the phenomenon described in the Nova Scotia Task Force Report on bullying and cyberbullying.
- The harmful consequences of cyberbullying are "extensive", including loss of selfesteem, anxiety, fear and school drop-outs. Moreover, victims of bullying were almost twice as likely to report that they attempted suicide compared to young people who had not been bullied.
- The immediacy and broad reach of modern electronic technology has made bullying easier, faster, more prevalent and crueller than ever before. Cyberbullying follows you home and into your bedroom; you can never feel safe, it is "non-stop bullying."

 cyberbullying is particularly insidious because it invades the home where children normally feel safe, and it is constant and inescapable because victims can be reached at all times and in all places.
- The anonymity available to cyberbullies complicates the picture further as it removes the traditional requirement for a power imbalance between the bully and victim, and makes it difficult to prove the identity of the perpetrator. Anonymity allows people who might not otherwise engage in bullying behaviour the opportunity to do so with less chance of repercussion.
- The cyber-world provides bullies with a vast unsupervised public playground.

What to Talk About with Teachers and Students

School boards have a duty to maintain a positive school environment for all persons it serves and they must watch for anything that might interfere with this duty. Given the Supreme Court of Canada's reliance on the Nova Scotia task force report, these findings in the report warrant a discussion with teachers and students:

- Bullying issues are not a new phenomenon; in fact, learning to deal with bullies is considered by many adults to be an inevitable part of growing up. However, harmful bullying behaviours can not be dismissed as just "kids joking around." Bullying causes serious physical and emotional injury, with potential longterm costs for personal health, professional success and social and emotional stability.
- Some young victims choose suicide as their way out. Adolescent mental health expert, Dr. Stan Kutcher, explained to the Nova Scotia task force that bullying does not directly cause suicide but youth suicide can be impulsive and bullying may be a contributing factor when other circumstances already exist. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadian teenagers 15 to 19 years old.
- A 2010 Canadian Teachers' Federation survey reveals that 85 per cent of Canadians feel bullying and violence are very serious problems. Canadian teachers ranked cyberbullying as their issue of highest concern from the six listed options with 89 per cent suggesting bullying and violence are serious problems in our public schools.
- Technology has changed the nature and scope of bullying, making it more insidious than ever before and making everyone vulnerable. As reported by one young victim, bullying may begin at school, but cyberbullying follows you home and into your bedroom; you can never feel safe, it is "non-stop bullying."
- Because the online bully can't see the victim's reaction, they may be oblivious to the hurt they have caused. Given the anonymity of the web, teachers are increasingly becoming targets; one in five teachers surveyed said they had knowledge of a teacher being cyberbullied. The cyberworld provides bullies with a vast unsupervised public playground, which challenges our

established methods of maintaining peace and order-it crosses jurisdictional boundaries, is open for use 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and does not require simultaneous interaction. Some young people fail to comprehend the public nature, extensive reach and long lasting implications associated with online communications, while others intentionally make use of this platform to share information with a potential audience of millions. The immediacy of online transactions encourages impulsive acts with no thought to consequences, a behaviour pattern that is already common in many youth, and peer pressure may further promote harmful deeds that unfortunately have instant and powerful impact with no effective retraction possible.

- History has taught us that no matter how well we educate children, whether it is about bullying and cyber bullying, or potential health hazards like smoking or not wearing seat belts, until society takes issues like these seriously and adults change their habits, children are unlikely to change theirs.
- Discuss how your school can change pervasive attitudes by modeling and teaching principles of empathy, respect, inclusiveness and diversity. This will require a whole school

approach, which means involving and educating all students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and any other members of the school community, and adapting all school policies and programs to fit this model. Schools must promote more parental involvement, increase adult supervision, engage the school leadership and send a firm message to the community that bullying issues will be addressed appropriately in a timely fashion.

Young people must be engaged in the process of combating bullying in their schools. What the youth of today do with technological innovations is poised on the edge of the horizon. The basic values of respect, responsibility, and the valuing of high quality, positive human relationships are for both parents and schools to inculcate, to teach, and to transmit. Our collective success depends on it. ■

Teresa Haykowsky (thaykowsky@mross. com) is a Partner at McLennan Ross, LLP. Suzanne Lundrigan is the Director of Communications for the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA).

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