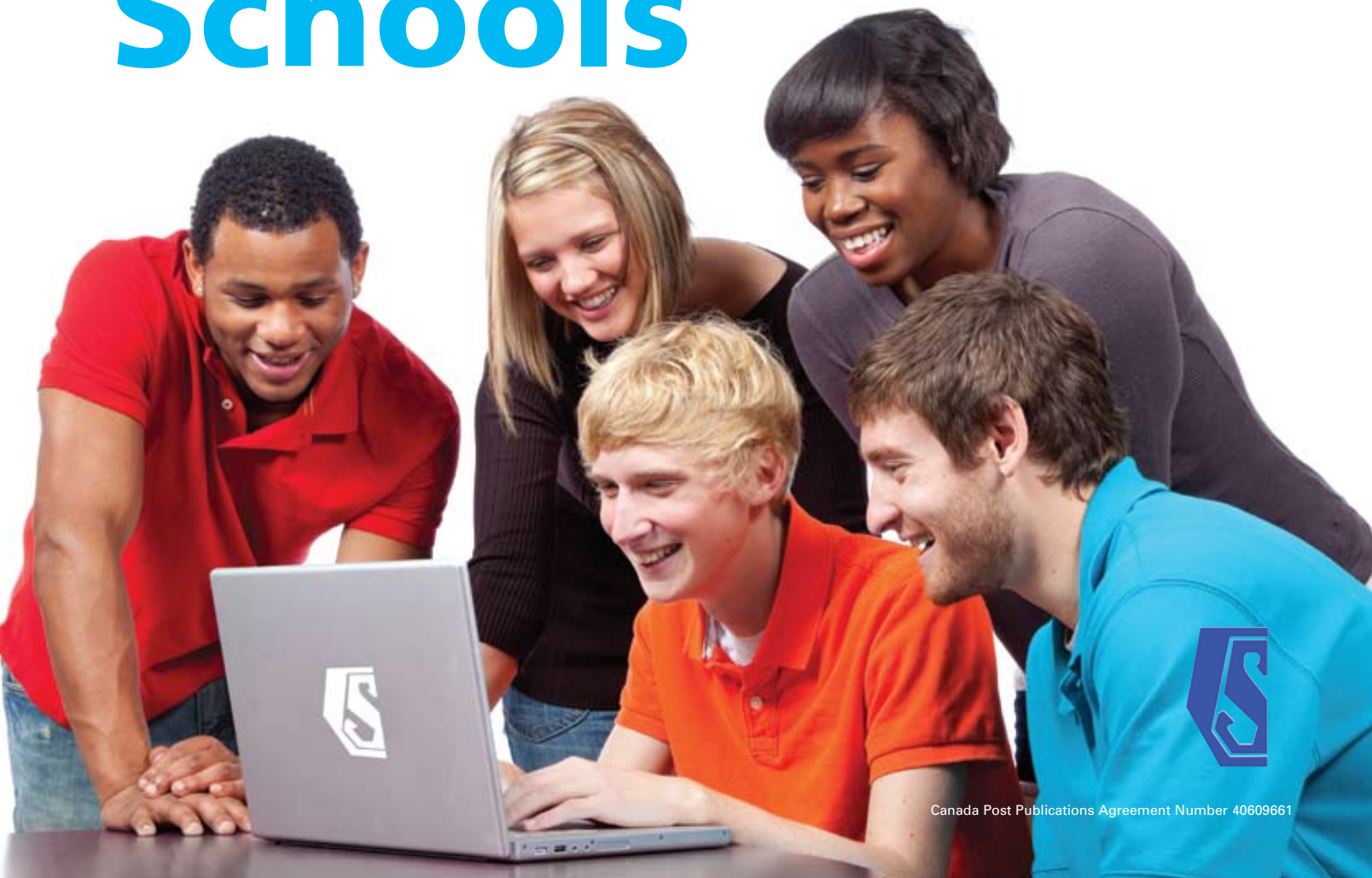


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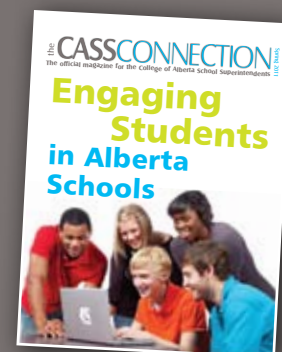
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in its elementary, junior high and high schools.





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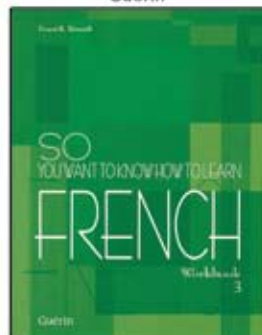
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# Message from the Minister of Education

The Honourable Dave Hancock | Minister of Education

**A**lberta's youth must have a voice in the decisions that affect their learning and their futures. By engaging students, our education system has an opportunity for students to tell us how we can offer education programs that are supportive, flexible and consistent with their needs.

The traditional model of our education is structured on a 19th century delivery model where students have traditionally been the passive recipients of learning. In today's complex world and with the advent of new information and supporting technology to convey this information, students have greater access to knowledge than previous generations.

Because of this and other factors, students are more aware that they can and should play an

active role in defining their educational experience.

Meaningful student engagement within the education sector all over the world has reached a defining moment—recognizing that student perspectives and involvement are essential to most education improvement efforts.

Research in this area demonstrates that when educators, administrators and others work with students as partners, as opposed to working for them, students feel empowered and validated. The same studies tell us that this approach strengthens students' commitment to education, their community and society, in general.

As part of Alberta's commitment to transform our education system, Speak Out – the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative was created in response to a promise made by government in the 2008 February throne speech "to provide a fresh and youthful perspective on learning."

Speak Out was launched in the fall of that year and has since created both a space and a

means to allow students aged 14 to 19 from across the province to reflect on and discuss their education with each other and with key education stakeholders who are making decisions about the nature of education.

Through Speak Out, the student voice has been captured to support Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction and other education initiatives such as curriculum development, international education and school technology.

When students are seriously engaged in critical reflection about their education experience, their interactions with teachers, administrators and others demonstrates that they will often provide unique and innovative strategies to learning and more importantly, how to make our schools better places to learn.

My hope is that we all continue to work collaboratively, students and educators alike through meaningful and ongoing conversations, where we empower each other to create and strengthen our shared education landscape, today and for future generations. ■



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# President's Message

**Barry Litun**

President

College of Alberta School Superintendents

"The need for curriculum to be engaging for students has long been evident. Expecting that students will learn a concept because 'it will be on the test' is unacceptable. The vision of our province's Action on Curriculum project is for 'engaging curriculum that inspires every student, every day.'"

**B**enjamin Franklin wrote, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." Although these words are from centuries ago, they ring as true today as when first put on paper. In this issue of *The CASS Connection*, you will read about the importance of engaging (involving) students in their learning.

Ensuring that students are engaged in their learning on a consistent basis must be a primary goal of everyone involved in education. This expectation is stated in Alberta Education's 2011–2014 Business Plan, which identifies education's mission as collaborating "to inspire every student to engage in high quality, inclusive learning opportunities."

While there are many descriptions that could be used to define student engagement, I refer to a statement by Phillip Schlechty, who believes students are engaged when "they are involved in their work, persist despite challenges and obstacles, and take visible delight in accomplishing their work." All of us involved in education have experienced the joy of supporting students who demonstrate the drive and determination necessary when solutions are not readily apparent. Further, there is no warmer feeling than to celebrate an 'a-ha' moment with a student who has unlocked the mystery of a problem.

I believe that for students to be engaged they must feel involved. Developing that sense of involvement is a challenge we face, but one we must overcome since there is an increasing expectation by our communities that students must feel they are partners in the teaching/learning process. This is evidenced by data from the Inspiring Action Facilitated Dialogues, where 93 per cent of respondents felt that it was important for students to be actively involved in decisions related to their education and 90 per cent felt

that students should be involved in assessing their learning.

Achieving this sense of involvement will fall on the shoulders of adults in the schools. Relationships between students and the adults who support them during the school day are critical for positive student engagement. The young people in our schools, whether they are six or 16 years old, will instinctively turn to those adults they can trust and who they believe care for them. Theodore Roosevelt's quote, "Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care," highlights the importance of strong relationships that can be found in an engaging classroom.

Finally, the need for curriculum to be engaging for students has long been evident. Expecting that students will learn a concept

because 'it will be on the test' is unacceptable. The vision of our province's Action on Curriculum project is for "engaging curriculum that inspires every student, every day." Engaging every student, every day is certainly a lofty goal; however the Action on Curriculum project is committed to ensuring Alberta's curriculum remains responsive and relevant for students. Relevancy is essential if there is an expectation for students to be engaged in their learning.

On behalf of the CASS Executive I extend thanks to all the contributors for sharing their research and their stories. I am confident that as you read through this edition you will take away ideas that can assist you in your work as instructional leaders, as outlined in Dimension 2 of the CASS Practice Standard. ■



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# Improved Learning for FNMI Students

Focusing on establishing relationships and enhancing teacher capacity in the Holy Spirit Catholic School Division.

By Chris Smeaton and Mary Anne Murphy

**H**oly Spirit Catholic School Division is a regional division that serves communities in the southwest corner of Alberta. Both the Kainai Reserve and the Piikani reserve neighbour our division. Although the Holy Spirit Catholic School Division demonstrates many indicators of high performance, it has nevertheless witnessed a significant gap in learning between FNMI (First Nations Métis Inuit) and non-FNMI students. Even though FNMI learning has long been a priority in the division, our success has been limited. During the last two years, our division has made significant strides in understanding FNMI learning needs and is aiming to build a system where FNMI students will be able to achieve at the same level as our non-FNMI students.

When the board, senior and school administration began setting focused priorities in 2008, FNMI learning came to the forefront. Even facing a significant shortfall in funding, the systemic will to improve was evident. In an effort to highlight the needs of our FNMI learners, two positions were created to provide leadership. The first was a division principal to oversee FNMI learning. The second was an FNMI lead teacher to work directly with teachers and students. This combination proved invaluable in our journey...from head to heart.

During our first year of focused attention, senior administration and our learning leadership team (principals and associate principals) engaged in two main activities: increasing

knowledge and building relationships. Each month, time was set aside at our learning leadership team meetings to better understand Blackfoot history and culture. We gained immeasurable insight into the perspective of our neighbours. This in itself provided a shift in our thinking and challenged our own perceptions and beliefs. Additional professional development activities provided more depth in our learning.

The relationship was enhanced early in the process by simply asking a question to our FNMI people. Too often our FNMI communities have been told what they needed to do to enhance their children's learning. We asked our FNMI families what we, as a school division, could do to support them and their children's learning experience.

Relationships were further established by board members, senior administration and school leaders visiting the Kainai reserve. Teams of administrators and FNMI support workers travelled together for the one hour drive. Our FNMI support workers were able to serve as guides along the way. They answered questions about the reserve, its history and the culture of its people. Administrators shared ideas and experiences from their own school sites with regards to FNMI learning. When they arrived at Kainai High School, the ongoing conversations with Kainai school leaders enhanced understanding.

In our second year, Holy Spirit Catholic Schools planned for increased knowledge and

relationship building with our teachers. We became involved in a one year project with Workforce Planning Branch of Alberta Education aimed at supporting FNMI student success. The result was an inquiry project entitled: *Niitohpookso'op (Relationships): Springboards to Learning for FNMI Students*. In partnership with the University of Lethbridge, we explored the following question: What are long-term strategies to enhance teacher capacity with the knowledge, skills and attributes (KSAs) necessary to improve First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) learning? We were able to identify four KSAs that linked to the building of strong relationships:

1. **Increase knowledge of history and culture;**
2. **Integrate authentic FNMI resources;**
3. **Recognize and respond to student needs; and**
4. **Nurture strong relationships.**

Using the traditional Medicine Wheel, we were able to visualize our work with our teachers.

## Enhancing FNMI Learner Success





This KSA focus is fostering an increased engagement of our FNMI students and families. Teachers are intentionally linking curriculum to FNMI perspective and content so that our FNMI students see their culture and heritage as relevant and important. As a result, teachers have shared their own experiences in creating welcoming and culturally responsive learning environments. A professional development video has been produced to illustrate these experiences. Our division has established ongoing dialogue with members of the Piikani and Kainai Nations, ensuring that we are working together to provide a positive future for our FNMI students. We are asking our FNMI families for their input through parent advisory meetings and public consultation events.

There is significant change in how barriers to FNMI learner success are being addressed in our school division. We recognize that poverty continues to be a major factor that negatively impacts any student's success and there is a need to find ways to work more seamlessly with outside agencies in breaking down that barrier for so many. We gave ourselves permission to admit what we didn't know about FNMI culture and history and were able to seek a better understanding of the needs through listening to, and learning from, our FNMI community. FNMI learner success is a provincial goal, but it is not that mandate that is causing change. Our administrators and teachers see the gap in learning, and rather than dismiss it with excuses, we are tackling it head on. We have moved collectively from head to heart! ■

*Chris Smeaton is the superintendent of Holy Spirit Catholic School Division in Southern Alberta.*

*Mary Anne Murphy is the division principal of FNMI Education and Religious Education for Holy Spirit Catholic School Division.*

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# Finding the Experience in Learning

By Shelley Robinson, PhD

*Creating space for the ebb and flow of student engagement.*

## Some trends and an essential question

Recently, in the educational institutions across our province, there has been considerable interest in 1) defining; 2) interpreting; 3) implementing; 4) measuring; and 5) further developing promising practice (all reciprocally) around the concept of student engagement (Inspiring Education, 2010; What Did You Do In School Today, 2009; Rocky View School Division Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Cycle 2 Research, 2003-2006). I find it refreshing that the Engaging Minds Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) Project recently, and humbly concluded that “we don’t really understand what student engagement means yet...[and that it is] an emerging concept [that] we need to work on together” (2011).

Student engagement is commonly strategized in classrooms as a series of enjoyable, and stimulating “intellectually” targeted learning activities with some attention paid to the affective learning domain, especially in light of educational research that considers the whole child and the various learning dispositions, as well as brain-based research (Gadsden, 2008; Gardner, 1993; Gregory, 2005; Jensen, 2006; Parry & Gregory, 2003; Sousa, 2006; Woolf, 2001). The drive for educators continues to focus on higher order thinking skills and problem solving (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Puccio & Murdock, 2001; Sousa, 2006), partly because this type of learning is measurable in terms of achievement. Unfortunately, this type of stimulating cognitive and even “metacognitive” engagement (Fogarty, 1994;

Foster, et al., 2002) does not always report well when students rate their level of student engagement. Adequate attention is not always paid to engaging pedagogy that balances all of the learning domains (cognitive, affective, conative-motivational, physical and spiritual) (Riggs, 1998; Robinson, 2009) in order to create a fully engaging learning experience.

To be truly engaged, we must be in touch with our minds, hearts, bodies and souls during and surrounding the learning experience. By doing so, the progressive educational language of “timeless learning” will need to enter our educational lexicon with inspiring words such as: “holistic/integrative; embodied; connected; soulful; transformative; flow[ing]; participatory; nondualistic; mysterious; and immeasurable” (Miller, 2006, pp. 5-12).

## The ebb and flow of learner engagement

First and foremost, students need to be “mindful” or truly “present” in the learning experience as this contributes to the students’ identification and appreciation of the learning experience (Gunaratana, 2002; Miller, 2006). Being “mindful” requires that students live the learning or the experience of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 and 1996; Belitz and Lundstrom, 1998). Being “reflective” is different than being “mindful” as it requires students to step out of this “pure experience” (Gunaratana, 2002) and “decenter” (Robinson, 2009) about their thinking (during or after the experience) in any of the following ways: “meta-cognitively, meta-conatively, meta-affectively, meta-kinesthetically, and meta-spiritually” (Robinson, 2009).

By doing so, it is yet another way to deepen and broaden the learning experience. Both mindful and reflective learning require creative uses of time and space.

When we want learning to be rigorously and richly engaging, we intrinsically know that creativity is a pivotal part of this experience (Sousa, 2006). However, to be truly creative, there needs to be a rhythm to learning that is facilitated by teachers within the course of a school day, week, month and year where students regularly experience two contrasting states: 1) mindful rejuv-engagement (ebb); and 2) engagement (flow). If both the ebb and flow of learning are not experienced, it becomes very difficult for students to adequately digest their learning experiences (Robinson, 2009).

We need to show students how to be present and restful in learning, just as we need to show them how to be active and engaged in their learning. The creative “slow-hunch” then has a chance to develop in the mindful classroom, and as well, “collide with other ideas” (Johnson, 2010) in the active classroom. The fine arts programs often model this type of creative process (Fineberg, 2004). Both aspects of the ebb and flow of student engagement are an essential part of a positive learning experience.

## Living the day in the life of a student: conclusion

I imagine that a radical re-thinking of our practice would occur if we had to walk a day in our students’ moccasins right from morning homeroom period, through each class period (with short breaks in between), concluded

by the end-of-day homeroom period; then followed by some rigorous extra-curricular programs (in and out of school), and/or work, and/or family responsibilities (Brooks, 2011).

Although there are pockets of innovative teaching and learning happening in our schools, I still believe that the confines of some of our academic systems in Alberta (ranging from traditional to contemporary organization and practice) would disable me (and others, Brooks, 2011) from experiencing learning optimally. I believe that we need to think about school differently if student engagement is truly what we are after. What is not good enough for us as re-visiting student educators in our provincial classrooms, is not good enough for our students (Brooks, 2011).

A truly mindful, engaging and reflective practice in a system that supports it, is a healthier practice for both teachers and students (Miller, 2006). A healthier practice encourages more positive relationships (Chopra, 2009). As a result, students remember these quality experiences and the value they placed on how they felt about these experiences.

In the end, they might even report on these experiences so that we can measure them. However, the “essence” of learning (Aoki, 2005) can sometimes be fleeting, intangible and immeasurable. Perhaps we need to trust our own “integral inquiry” (Miller, 2006) as educators to know that positive learning experiences happened in our schools today. ■

*Dr. Shelley Robinson is a writer, educator, researcher and mother (not necessarily in this order). She is presently an administrator at the Calgary Science School.*

*To see references for this article, you can email [kkornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:kkornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net).*

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# Addressing Mental Health

## *Impacts in the Classroom.*

By Roxanne Felix, Ann Goldblatt and Lisa Shortyk



When a student doesn't engage in the classroom, we sometimes look for a ready explanation and simple solution within the school. But, the answer may not always lie entirely within the school's approach. Sometimes, the problem can be a symptom of something beneath the surface, such as a mental health issue. It is estimated that 10-20 per cent of Canadian youth are affected by a mental disorder—the single most disabling group of disorders worldwide.

In Canada, only one in five children who needs mental health services receives them (Canadian Mental Health Association). However, an innovative school-based mental health program has demonstrated an effective strategy to help engage students with mental health concerns. It required a partnership between the school and health care systems.

*A Safe Place* is a classroom that serves students from three Edmonton junior high schools and is nested within an existing wrap-around service. *A Safe Place* helps students with their mental health, school work and social interactions while remaining in their neighbourhood school. The goal is for the student to return to the regular classroom within four months.

In August of 2009, the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research funded an evaluation of *A Safe Place* to understand the impact of the program on youth and their families and to understand the factors contributing to its success.

The evaluators interviewed teachers, principals and staff of the program, as well as

participating youth and their parents. The evaluation also looked at some preliminary data for changes in the youth's attendance, academic success, hope and self-esteem.

The evaluation results showed that students' attendance dramatically improved and there were no suspensions for any of the youth after they had participated in *A Safe Place*. There were also increases in their scores for hope and self-esteem. The numbers indicated increased engagement of the students and improved well-being.

The stories of the involved school community overwhelmingly indicated the success of the program. School staff described a marked improvement in the students' interest in school, and, as a result, better academic achievement. Although the youths' Academy of Reading and Math scores stayed the same, their marks improved. Many of the students could not advance their Academy scores as they were at the top end of the program's capabilities. By attending school regularly, the youth had better opportunities to learn. The youth were also learning social skills, how to relate to their peers, and how to express their feelings.

One school administrator remarked: "We had one student not attending and had to go to the attendance board. This year, after *A Safe Place*, I see a more productive and engaging year for this student. Attendance is up, she smiles; she connects with other students. Teachers indicate her work is done on a regular basis. She didn't take ownership of her assignments before and found a reason not

to do them. Now she does assignments and is successful at them."

### What makes the program such a success?

The evaluators identified seven key factors:

- *A Safe Place* is **school-based** which makes it easier for the student when they leave *A Safe Place* and go back to their regular classroom. It also enhances the accessibility of the program;
- *A Safe Place* helps students and families **get needed support quickly**, especially supports that are already available through the wrap-around services in these three schools. Other services required are: mental health support for both student and family; community programs; life experience opportunities; and services that address basic needs;
- *A Safe Place* is **flexible. It works with individual students' needs and strengths**. As a result, other parts of *A Safe Place* program also have to be flexible, including: hours of the classroom; how the student enters and leaves the program; and what staff in this program can do;
- *A Safe Place* has a **smaller classroom size. It helps the student build a trusting relationship with the teacher** and other classmates. The small classroom helps the student feel included and not judged;
- *A Safe Place* has built **effective communication** between the teacher of *A Safe Place*, the teachers of regular classrooms, the students, and the principals and vice-principal of the three schools;



- **The physical environment** (the couches, the computers and the brightly coloured walls) of *A Safe Place* helps the student feel included and welcomed; and
- *A Safe Place* is **holistic**. It helps the student grow in two areas: their schoolwork and their emotional well-being. They get to practice how they relate to other students and other adults in a safe environment.

The final element—a holistic approach that includes the family—evolved because *A Safe Place* staff identified that nothing would improve for the youth, unless the parents were involved. This holistic approach led to an unexpected outcome. Not only were youth more engaged with the school, but so were the parents. Families who wouldn't answer phone calls from the school were now actively working with school staff to help their child.

At first glance, tackling mental health issues as an underlying root cause of a student being unengaged in school can seem like an overwhelming task. But, there are answers. If schools and the health care system can work together to find solutions, the benefits can extend beyond the classroom and impact the whole school community. ■

*Please contact Roxanne Felix (roxanne.m.felix@gmail.com) or Lisa Shortyk (lisa.shortyk@albertahealthservices.ca) for more information on this project.*

*Roxanne Felix and Ann Goldblatt are evaluation consultants that specialize in evaluating community-based health promotion projects. They are also adjunct faculty members of the School of Public Health, University of Alberta. Lisa Shortyk is a registered nurse with Alberta Health Services who works in the area of paediatric mental health, in the community environment.*



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# M-Powered Learning and Student Engagement

*Mobile learning through the use of mobile devices holds an opportunity to engage students.*

By Karen Pegler, Susan Crichton, Duncan White, Brant Parker

**M**ight mobile devices be the “magic bullet” to encourage student engagement? Educators are starting to look closely at the potential of these powerful tools. The 2011 Horizon Report states mobile devices will outnumber computers within a year. The excitement around these devices is understandable.

## Background

Learning Innovation, a service unit within the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), conceptualized a mobile learning and digital citizenship initiative in 2009. The project team, including a researcher from the University of Calgary, identified participating schools, designed professional development activities, purchased and deployed hardware and software, and supported teachers, students, administrators and IT staff to integrate the devices and peripheral technologies. The project coincided with the launch of a student-accessible wireless within CBE schools.

The kick-off for this initiative involved the project team, working with Apple Canada, inviting teachers to be immersed in a professional learning experience that required them to complete an inquiry-based task utilizing the devices. This immersive approach is supported by literature suggesting teachers typically teach the way they learn (Stitt-Gohdes, 2001), and they should be supported to experience innovations as learners first before they are called upon to use them in their practice (Jacobsen & Crichton, 2003).

Teachers and students were supported by regular visits by project team members who offered pedagogical and technical support. From the beginning, digital citizenship (Ribble & Bailey, 2007) was introduced as a core foundation to the deployment of technology. Digital citizenship informed admirable use guidelines (Richardson, 2009) that in turn informed the use of the devices in school and the commitments required for students to take the project devices home.

Mobile technologies generally are designed to be personalized by individual

users. They acquire content and applications (apps) through synchronizing to a proprietary application such as iTunes or the Android Market. When used in a classroom setting, each device is synchronized to a common classroom account.

## Findings

The iPod Touch devices were deployed in two elementary classrooms (grades five and six), two junior high classrooms (grade eight Social Studies), and one high school classroom (Social Studies 12-2). The iPads were deployed in one elementary, one middle school, and one high school class.

When asked whether students would recommend iPod Touches for other classrooms, 64 per cent of elementary students said YES, suggesting they were fun to use, but 36 per cent worried the devices were too small and too tempting to just play with. Fifty-four percent of junior high students said YES, commenting, “They are fun and a better way to learn,” while 42 per cent said MAYBE, commenting they were very distracting.

High school students were the most critical of the devices, with 58 per cent responding MAYBE, commenting “apps aren’t fully integrated into our education/they aren’t made for classroom setting, and they are distracting.”

Twenty-two per cent responded vehemently NO, commenting they make “doing projects too complicated, frustrating and takes too much time; more of a distraction than educating [sic].”

Almost a year later, high school students again asked if they would recommend the devices; 23 per cent said NO, 62 per cent said YES, and 15 per cent were UNSURE. The teacher had conditional support for the device. All administrators responded strongly YES.

Initial findings from the iPad deployment in a high school found 71 per cent of students would recommend the devices, 2 per cent said no, and 17 per cent were unsure. The teacher was positive about the experience.

Classroom observations yielded an understanding of how the devices were actually being used. As might be anticipated, the use varied based on the teachers’ comfort with the device. The most innovative use was the



student creation of a game to support a social studies concept; the most typical use was a reference tool (access to a thesaurus or Internet).

#### Discussion/implications

Both iPod Touch and iPad devices appear to engage students. Teachers reported they had no problem using the devices; however, some struggled to integrate them into their teaching and design meaningful activities. School readiness to deploy the devices was a critical variable as infrastructure requirements are quite different for mobile technologies than for conventional computers (White, Crichton, & Pegler, 2010).

A focus on digital citizenship appears to have helped with concerns such as vandalism, loss, and inappropriate use. Findings suggest digital citizenship invites a positive view of issues rather than focusing on all the things that students shouldn't do with the devices.

Possibly the most interesting finding is the confirmation that schools and IT staff must recognize the day of teacher-directed learning in the computer lab is gone.

One only needs to look around to see how prolific and pervasive mobile learning technology has become in the lives of many young (and not so young) people. Our work within this project has helped illuminate how these devices can fit not only within our students' pockets and packs, but also within today's learning environments to provide new avenues for student productivity and engagement. ■

*A CBE specialist, Karen Pegler uses her 20 years of teaching experience and a Masters in Educational Technology to design and support professional learning.*

*Susan Crichton is an associate professor who researches the role of technology to enrich education and provide access and opportunity to learners in challenging contexts.*

*With a Masters in Educational Technology and educator for over 20 years, Duncan White (CBE specialist) supports teachers as they personalize learning using technology.*

*Brant Parker is the director of innovation and learning technology with the CBE and is a passionate advocate for teacher development and innovation in education.*

*To see references for this article, you can email [kkornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:kkornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net).*

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# Transforming Alberta High Schools:

## *The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project.*

By Janet Grenier and Gerry Fijal

**E**ducation in Alberta is transforming. In classrooms throughout the province, resourceful teachers are responding to the 21st Century student in innovative ways to keep them interested, motivated and engaged in learning at school. However, there are structures at all levels in the education system which can stand in the way of some of the innovations that teachers desire to better reach their students. The High School Flexibility Project is an excellent example of a collaborative effort between schools, school jurisdictions and government.

Currently in its second of four years, the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project involves 16 high schools from 16 jurisdictions around Alberta. The participating schools are exploring alternatives to high school program delivery and structure by removing the 25 hour per credit requirement.

Principals of participating schools have engaged students, teachers and parents in a dialogue about redesign which has led to a wide variety of strategies implemented throughout the project including:

- Introducing flexible time within the school day for students to direct their own learning;
- Developing a role of “teacher advisor” including dedicated time in the school day for teachers to build learning relationships with students; and
- Varying the use of technology to both enhance classroom instruction as well as offer any time, any place, any pace learning.

As the project has evolved, funds have been made available to support collaboration among teachers, principals and superintendents of participating schools. These collaborative



meetings have provided outstanding sources of information for government to reflect on to understand its role in the transformation of the education system. As the project continues to unfold through to June 2013, findings will be shared with all education stakeholders through the release of annual reports. The project's overview, participating schools and current annual report is available on the Alberta Education website (<http://education.alberta.ca/admin/highschoolcompletion/projects/high-school-flexibility-enhancement-project.aspx>).

### **The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project at Sainte-Marguerite-Bourgeoys (Calgary)**

So what's unique about Ecole Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys other than we are a kindergarten to grade 12 Catholic, Francophone school located in southwest Calgary? We are also one of 16 schools in the province involved in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. Participating in the project are the school's 45 high school students and 130 junior high students.

From the very first meeting with our planning committee, we were committed to encouraging our students to become engaged, active participants in their learning. Fundamental innovations were discussed and established, the most important being the role of the Teacher Advisor, access to flexible time and an inter-disciplinary approach to teaching.

TA time, scheduled from 8:45 to 9:00 am, is dedicated to the taking of the attendance and sharing of daily messages, but most importantly, as a time for teachers to meet with students individually.

As we are a K to 12, the elementary, junior high and high school six-day cycle timetables are interconnected as common areas such as the gymnasium, the music room and the cafeteria are shared by all students.

As part of our redesign, we have initiated flex blocs for grades nine to 12. Flex blocs, scheduled throughout the morning every second day, encourage students to take ownership of their learning. Students can opt to work in the library, the student lounge or an available classroom on assignments of their choice, with teachers who are available for students who need assistance.

Professional development and planning time has also been set aside so that teachers can dialogue and work together on inter-disciplinary projects.

As Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys evolves within the High School Flexibility Project, we will continue to encourage our students to become engaged, active participants in their learning. ■

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*Janet Grenier is currently serving in her fourth year as principal of Ecole Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys.*

*Gerry Fijal is currently seconded to Alberta Education as the project manager of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project.*

# 21st Century Learning in Elementary Classrooms

By Barb Brown and Lynn Leslie

The Calgary Catholic School District is involved in a three-year Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) project focused on building 21st century learning environments. The project is designed to increase student engagement, learning, and performance by improving teachers' technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge also known as the TPACK model (Mishra & Koeler, 2008) depicted in Figure 1.

There are 85 elementary schools with 19 full-time AISI teachers supported by a district level consultant and steering committee comprised of various stakeholders. Each AISI teacher is assigned a cohort of three to six schools. They provide embedded professional learning to teachers and also support school administrators in establishing communities of practice that encourage collaborative planning, sharing and learning.

The AISI teacher works alongside classroom teachers to integrate the TPACK model in the areas of literacy, technology, numeracy, English as a Second Language (ESL) and differentiated learning. Furthermore, the AISI teacher works towards building teacher capacity to create 21st century learning environments through a shared leadership, service and support model which provides the foundation for professional collaboration and learning (Figure 2).

For example, the AISI teacher may begin by planning a lesson with a teacher and may introduce new practices and tools, such as digital storytelling or web 2.0 tools. At this stage, it is necessary to provide leadership in innovation and help with the understanding of the TPACK model and new ways of teaching and learning.

Next, the AISI teacher may provide service by collaboratively teaching the lesson with the teacher. Finally, the AISI teacher releases the lesson or transfers ownership of the activity to the classroom teacher. Most importantly, the AISI teacher visits the school regularly which allows for continued support to ensure growth and sustainability.

The following testimonial from a principal demonstrates the leadership, service and support model in action: "Our AISI teacher has been an amazing asset to the school and has worked with our administrative team to immerse teachers into

a 21st century environment as part of our regular professional learning sessions even though initially there was some resistance to begin exploring new pedagogies with technology... One of the teachers, known for his expertise with content and pedagogy, needed additional support with technological knowledge. The AISI teacher provided personalized support for technological knowledge in order to move the teacher beyond his comfort zone in a safe way. He is now hooked on the TPACK model; he is willing to try new things and has a positive 'I can' attitude which is transferring to other staff members through his leadership."

Through the AISI project, innovative practices are moving out of isolation. The integrated work of school administrators, AISI teachers and classroom teachers is fostering collaborative cultures, partnering relationships and strengthening educational practices for 21st century learning.

Barb Brown is supervisor of educational technology and Lynn Leslie is lead consultant for the 21st century learning project in elementary schools for the Calgary Catholic School District. Information and updates regarding the AISI project can also be accessed at <http://www.cssd.ab.ca>.

To see references for this article, you can email [kkornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:kkornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net).

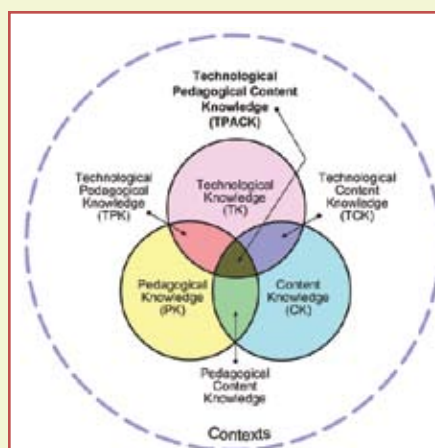


Figure 1. Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK). Reprinted with permission from [www.tpack.org](http://www.tpack.org)

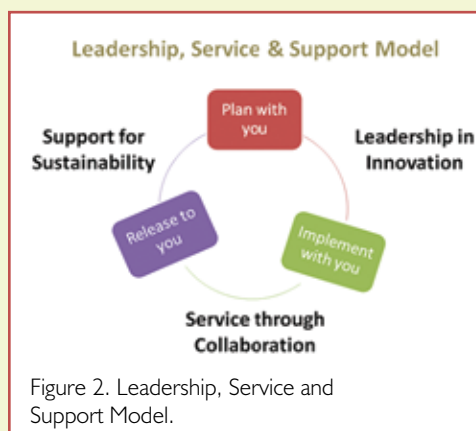


Figure 2. Leadership, Service and Support Model.

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# Becoming Engaged Thinkers and Global Citizens

By Dave Khatib and Paul Mason

As school divisions consider how to increase student engagement, the ability to provide an opportunity for students to use Personal Electronic Devices (PEDs) has become an alternative worth exploring. St. Thomas Aquinas School (Grade six to nine), in Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division, recently concluded a pilot project where students were encouraged to bring their own PEDs to school, register them on the school's network, and assisted teachers to explore the use of PEDs in the classroom. The guiding principles of this pilot project were to: ensure online student safety; maintain equitable student access to technology; and develop teacher professional development that would allow the use of PEDs in a classroom setting.

To assist in ensuring safe online access it was a requirement that all students participate in a series of four digital citizenship lessons prior to any PED's being registered on the school's network. The four lessons specifically examined the areas of what to do when faced with inappropriate content, cyber bullying, online peer pressure and disclosure of personal information. This online self-awareness, coupled with the school division's content filter, created a safe and secure environment for students.

The possible digital divide that can occur when there is inequitable access or availability

of PEDs for students was overcome with the purchase of 15 iPod Touch devices and 5 netbooks by the school. The school-owned PEDs were available for students to sign out from the library on a per-class duration or a full day basis. This allowed students who did not have the ability to purchase their own PEDs to still participate in classroom activities that centered on their use. Although many students signed out the school-owned PEDs, one particular group that frequently used these devices were ESL students who used them in an assistive manner for English translation.

Teacher professional development was seen as vital to the success of this pilot project and significant resources were utilized in this regard. Through a series of diverse professional development sessions, teachers were introduced to ideas how to incorporate PEDs into the curriculum. For example, in a math 8 class, students used PEDs along with the Wolfram Alpha application and website ([www.wolframalpha.com](http://www.wolframalpha.com)) to design questions for unit assessment. This application allowed students to see step-by-step a mathematical equation and its solution.

Qualitative and quantitative feedback for the project was collected from parents, students and teachers. Overwhelmingly there was strong support to continue with student PED access to the school's network.



In the type of digital educational environment that was created during this pilot project, students took greater control of their own learning by using technology to personalize their learning experiences and they were able to use tools that more closely matched their learning styles. Through strategic planning students had equitable access and opportunity to safely use technology seamlessly as an integral part of their learning environment. Teachers and administrators created dynamic, digital learning cultures which maximized the use of media-rich resources to produce relevant and engaging learning experiences. St. Thomas Aquinas School connected with parents in their homes and workplaces, and reached out to the global community in ways never before imagined. ■

*Dave Khatib ([dkhatib@rdcrd.ab.ca](mailto:dkhatib@rdcrd.ab.ca) or 403-346-8951) is principal of St. Thomas Aquinas School and Paul Mason ([pmason@rdcrd.ab.ca](mailto:pmason@rdcrd.ab.ca) or 403-343-1055) is associate superintendent of Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division.*



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# Setting Their Direction with Student Learning Plans (SLPs)

By Brandy Yee, BKin, BEd, MEd

Student learning plans (SLPs) are one of the many ways the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) is bringing life and meaning to personalization of student learning. These plans are intended to strengthen and deepen the learning experience for all students, acting as a blue-print, supporting students as they come to understand themselves as learners and guiding them as they transition from grade to grade, school to school and then on to post-secondary or work options.

Our knowledge of our students and of next practices in pedagogy tells us that students are the only ones who can truly personalize their learning. Therefore, key to the success of SLPs in the CBE has been student voice and choice. The notion of a digitized medium for students to house student work is not new, as ePortfolio work had begun in many CBE schools long before the introduction of SLPs.

While an ePortfolio-type collection of artifacts and reflections form an important component of the SLP, the strength and foundation for our SLPs lie in the connection to the five "Ends" statements of our board of trustees. The Ends guide our collective work as teachers and students. Personalized information, artifacts and reflections are linked to each of the CBE Ends as students create their learning plans: in the **Personal Development** section of their SLP students identify their learning strengths and areas for growth and come to understand themselves better as learners; in **Academic Development** students set and reflect on learning goals, transition planning is addressed and plans for support services/intervention are developed if needed; in **Citizenship Development** students set goals about school/community contributions and reflect on their service learning opportunities; and in the **Character Development** section, students investigate the impact their social environment plays in their learning and how best to represent their learning and showcase their skills. Finally, in **Career Development** section, which links to our Mega End that focuses on the foundation for lifelong learning, students



plan for post-secondary and/or work options by exploring career possibilities, engaging in occupational searches, building resumes and identifying employability skills.

Essential in the SLP process is the opportunity for students to use their learning plan as a way to communicate about themselves as learners with their teachers and other key adults.

Wilma Hansen, a junior high school of 450 students in south east Calgary has adopted a school-wide approach to SLPs. Part of their success has been the involvement of one key teacher who works with each student as they enter junior high to ensure they begin to understand themselves as learners and how to advocate for their learning. Students use D2L, an online distributed learning tool, to effectively house and build upon all elements of the SLP as students develop their understanding of themselves as learners and collect evidence of their learning.

In a world that is changing at a rate faster than any other period in history, we as teachers, need to partner with our students to create conditions for lifelong personalized learning. Although only in its beginning stages in our system, SLPs have played a key role in engaging students in their learning and developing habits of the mind necessary for success outside the walls of our buildings. ■

*Brandy Yee works for the CBE as a middle years learning specialist, focusing on instructional design and assessment in the CBE's 52 middle/junior high schools.*

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# PWA Creating

# Excited, Engaged and Responsible Learners

By Sue Farrell Holler

**G**iving high school students more freedom and responsibility for their learning is creating excited, engaged learners at a school in the Peace Wapiti School Division.

The grade nine to 12 Peace Wapiti Academy (PWA) began experimenting last September to see if students really needed 25 hours in the classroom to earn a CEU. It's one of 16 Alberta schools testing the effect of alternative daily schedules.

The most noticeable change at PWA was the introduction of a one-hour "iPlan" block mid-morning. It's similar in concept to a teacher prep block: students can work on whatever they need. It could be homework, catching up on class assignments, working on group projects, writing tests, taking an extra tutorial, or choosing a Career and Technology Studies (CTS) module that wouldn't normally fit into their timetables.

The hour was made up by shaving 16 minutes from each of four educational blocks, with

traditional class time reduced from 81 minutes to 65 minutes. Students make up some of that time writing tests or completing assignments during the iPlan block.

"This not only creates learning time in the classroom, but also fosters a growing sense of individual student responsibility toward the learning," says Josie Nagtegaal, a math teacher and the project's co-ordinator.

Now in the second semester of offering iPlan at PWA, Nagtegaal says students would be upset if it were taken away completely. "They appreciate the downtime to do what they need to get done," she says.

As the school is moving toward project-based learning, the role of teachers has also changed. Rather than the teacher lecturing and the students taking notes and writing tests, students are expected to choose projects to demonstrate their knowledge. While they still have teacher support whenever they need it, it makes the students more responsible for their own learning.

PWA also introduced Academic and Individual Mentor (AIM) this year. Rather than simply directing students, teachers have become student advocates who monitor learning progress and guide the students as needed. "I'm finding it's taking less time to get the kids where they need to be," says Nagtegaal.

PWA Principal Wanda Gerard is excited about how the changes are evolving and how they are engaging students. The interest in "PWA Connect" for instance, has simply exploded.

Close to 50 students in the 500-student school are re-learning parts of the curriculum to upgrade their marks, or to help them transition into the next level of specific subjects.

Removing the 25-hour rule has allowed staff to look at how teens learn and to design programs that fit. Gerard, who often overhears students talking about learning, describes it as a "foundational shift."

"Is it a success? Yes, I definitely see it as a success," says Gerard. "The excuses and reasons they had before—that were easy to hang their hat on—are gone. It's easier for them to make decisions based on how they want to learn and what they want to learn."

Gerard hopes the concept will spread throughout the district, allowing idea exchanges and more collaborative work among teachers. In the meantime, the school is busy exchanging ideas with other schools involved in the High School Flexibility Project. In early March, it hosted a one-day collaborative workshop for the 16 schools involved in the project. ■

*Sue Farrell Holler is a freelance writer and children's author. She has produced the popular newspaper-style newsletter, "Spotlight", for the Peace Wapiti School Division for the past 15 years.*

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## Engaging our Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Students

The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) is in the process of reviewing educational programming for gifted students in the system. Teachers, principals, parents and students were invited to be part of this process and nearly 200 people joined the conversation. Students in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program at three schools, one elementary, one junior high and one senior high, were selected to act as representatives for their school and for the program as a whole. Their input, along with that of the parents and staff, will be used to inform decisions as changes are contemplated about how GATE programming is offered by the CBE.

The student representatives ranged from grades four to 12, each bringing unique perspectives to the conversation. An hour-long “facilitated conversation” was held at three randomly selected schools with groups of six to twelve students. We were interested in students’ perspectives on what they value in their education, what they perceive to be the characteristics of students in the GATE program and their ideas on the future of programming for gifted students.

The students were fully engaged in the process, providing thoughtful and enthusiastic feedback. Their ability to articulate their learning needs reminds us of why seeking student input is so valuable. It also highlights the importance of diverse programming, responsive to the many different voices students can bring to the table.

The input collected from students was often more wide-ranging, more creative and more concrete in terms of their day-to-day

education than feedback from parents and staff. In all three sessions students provided practical ideas to better meet their learning needs. Their suggestions included restoration of an open inquiry class where students could take on larger scale projects in an area of interest to them, the creation of a period in the day or week set aside specifically for students to share what they have learned with each other, and a need for a minimum level of experience or training specifically for GATE teachers.

There were many similar themes throughout the conversations. For example, students expressed a feeling of fitting in, that they were accepted for being smart and a little “quirky;” they valued the social connections with their classmates and teachers who could understand

and challenge them; opportunities to explore subjects of interest were considered critical to their learning and all expressed a desire for more time for self-directed learning.

At the same time, differences emerged across the grade levels. The elementary students focussed on what and how they were learning, particularly compared to their experiences before they’d entered GATE. The junior high students provided the most wide-ranging feedback, exploring what it means to be a GATE student, connections with peers and teachers, understanding the curriculum and how they can drive their own educational experience. The high school students were very future oriented, focussing on how GATE has prepared them for post-secondary education and “the real world.”

The students’ perceptions of how their learning needs could best be met relates directly to the question of how GATE programming is offered by the CBE. Engaging students in the system’s decision making processes not only provides students a voice but also provides decision makers a unique perspective on what is and what could be. Ultimately, students are the ones these decisions impact and tapping into their perspective is paramount. ■

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*Nicole Genereux, BA, MSc, has worked with the Calgary Board of Education for the past five years, initially as a planner and now as a community engagement consultant.*



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# Differentiating Using Authentic Science

By Kathryn O'Grady

A traditional lesson in science often involves teaching a concept, verifying the theory with an experiment or activity, and then reinforcing the knowledge through practice. When using this method in an inclusive classroom, teachers may plan multiple lessons to meet the range of student needs. According to brain-based learning theory and constructivist models of learning, this sequencing of instruction may be limiting our students' ability to understand science.

## Do science first to increase understanding

In differentiated instruction, one lesson can be experienced by the entire class while meeting the needs of individual students. Drawing from experiential education, if lessons begin with an experience, then concepts can be learned while students are actively engaged in an inquiry process that leads them to confront their misconceptions.

Misconceptions in science often arise because students develop a mental model to help them visualize abstract concepts. These models are

developed using their prior knowledge and may not be the same as the scientific model intended by the teacher. By introducing a concept through an activity, both students and teacher begin the learning using the same mental model. This may limit the development of misconceptions or allow the teacher to identify them more easily. Indeed, in a recent survey of inquiry-based teaching models, students learning using hands-on activities were more likely to score higher on science assessment tests. An example of such inquiry-based teaching follows.

## Understanding electrochemistry in high school

In high school chemistry, students study two types of electrical cells—one produces energy like using a battery and the other consumes energy like charging a battery. The typical lesson sequence involves teaching the theory for the first type of cell and then students set up variations of the cell to verify the

Teachers from Edmonton Catholic Schools work collaboratively on differentiated instructional strategies for their inclusive junior high science classes.



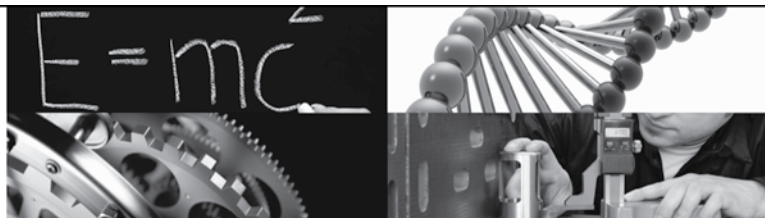
information. Surprisingly, students generally did not link theoretical and practical knowledge when the concepts were learned discretely in this way and few students were able to apply their knowledge to the second type of cell. I found that student understanding increased when they worked with both types of operating cells first. Even though the theory lessons that followed were based on abstract concepts, they were made more meaningful to the students because they were explicitly linked using two different ways of representing the information. Students become more successful at recognizing how the same theory can be applied over a range of different examples. More importantly, as the lab groups attempted to relate the experimental observations to the theory, students began to identify and correct their own misconceptions.

## Learning in a social context promotes understanding

According to social constructivism, knowledge develops in a social context. Thus discourse during science activities is important for deeper learning. When listening to themselves and their peers, students began to identify their misconceptions and to make sense of abstract ideas using a practical context. When students were given choices to demonstrate their knowledge they began to move from a rote learning style to deeper understanding.

Teachers from Edmonton Catholic Schools work collaboratively on differentiated instructional strategies for their inclusive junior high science classes. ■

*Kathryn O'Grady, PhD PMP, is the K-12 science consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools. For more information, contact the author at [Kathryn.O'Grady@ecsd.net](mailto:Kathryn.O'Grady@ecsd.net).*



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# Breaking Boundaries and Creating Networks

By Wilco Tymensen

Alberta Education defines AISI as a bold approach to supporting the improvement of student learning and performance by encouraging teachers, parents, and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative initiatives based upon local needs and circumstances.

It is a collaboration endeavour supported by seven partners: CASS, ASBOA, ATA, ASCA, ASBA, Alberta Universities, and AB ED. Recent comments shared by Ben Levin at a January CASS Moving and Improving session made suggestions regarding the concept of improving our sharing of best practice:

“A further challenge in a bottom-up strategy is sharing learning. After 10 years of projects, it should be clear that some ideas work better than others. We don’t need each school to learn for itself the importance of student or parent engagement or how to build a strong professional learning community...but many innovation systems don’t have adequate processes for sharing what we know.” (Levin, 2010)

Southern Alberta is addressing this concern head on with its seven-jurisdiction collaborative AISI project which takes a look at how to engage students at the classroom level. They are working collaboratively to develop interactive math K-grade10 units using SMARTNotebook as a common platform.

Built upon the success of the grade one to 12 Social Units, the Interactive Math AISI Project (IMAP) is about more than just building resources as seven jurisdictions share pedagogy, discuss learning strategies, and work towards improving learning outcomes for students. Breaking down jurisdictional boundaries is creating networks that support and enhance the creation of and sharing of best practices at a level that directly affects the classroom and thus the student. These networks are bringing new opportunities for each jurisdiction as we purposely support each other to improve learner engagement through innovation.

Units are designed around a backwards by design framework and:

- are based entirely on the new Alberta curriculum and reflect current research on sound pedagogical practices;
- reflect 21st century learning including accessing technology and meaningfully engaging students;
- incorporate sound assessment strategies and Understanding by Design practices based on the work of Anne Davies, Jay McTighe, Grant Wiggins, and the Alberta Assessment Consortium resources;
- incorporate instructional strategies researched and developed by Barrie Bennett, Carol Rolheiser, Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering and Jane Pollock;
- Contain outcomes grouped in a contextual manner, rather than by strand, to enable students to recognize relationships across the curriculum. Outcomes are revisited a number of times to allow students multiple opportunities to explore concepts and mathematical processes, which result in increased student understanding and retention; and

- are created with the leadership from seven Jurisdictional math specialists, working in a PLC model with opportunity for inter- and/or intra- jurisdictional collaboration.

While they are comprehensive and accessible as a common resource by teachers across seven jurisdictions, the units are viewed as a solid foundation for starting one’s planning and instructional journey. Built around SMARTnotebook, teachers have the ability to personalize them to meet their teaching style, their students’ learning styles, and classroom realities.

Ursula K. LeGuin states, “It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.” For these seven jurisdictions it is the collaborative pedagogical journey that has made all the difference. ■

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<sup>1</sup>Levin, B. (2010) *Education improvement in Alberta*. Retrieved January 7, 2011, from <http://www.pdkintl.org>

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# Integrating Critical Thinking and Direct Instruction

By John Picard and Garfield Gini-Newman

For many people involved in education in Calgary, the idea that students at Foundations for the Future Charter Academy are demonstrating well-developed skills in independent inquiry and critical thinking would seem to be contradictory. Foundations for the Future (FFCA) is much better known for the practice and promotion of the direct instruction model of teaching, and direct instruction of knowledge, skills and concepts is often perceived as being antithetical to the notion of students learning through independent inquiry and discovery.

The term “direct instruction” derives primarily from the work of Barak Rosenshine (1979, 1986), who identified common “teaching functions” which had proved to be effective in improving student learning. These teaching functions included teaching in small steps with student practice after each step, guiding students during initial practice, and ensuring that all students experienced a high level of successful practice.

As Rosenshine described it, direct instruction is a generic teaching model, one awaiting subsequent interpretation and development in particular applications. Working with the support of the Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2), teachers at FFCA are finding that the



direct instruction model is very amenable to the integration of critical thinking challenges.

In a typical direct instruction lesson, after identifying the key learning outcomes and the means of assessment, student engagement is activated with a preparatory set of advance organizers, sometimes called the “hook”. When teachers focus the “hook” on being an invitation to solve a problematic situation or a “critical challenge”, teachers create the conditions for student engagement and achievement. As students work to solve the problem, their learning of background knowledge and their conceptual understanding develops in a context that derives from the challenge.

Shirley Coughlan’s grade seven classes spend considerable time learning about the various historical events leading to Confederation. As they learn about these events, they are also learning to determine which ones have the most “historical significance”. The criteria for historical significance are taught directly, with multiple examples, until the students come to a place where they can apply those criteria on their own.

These young people have been exercising critical thinking and coming to an understanding of historical events that goes well beyond the learning of facts and dates. At the same time, a great deal of direct instruction has been brought to bear in equipping students with solid background knowledge and skills in research, critical thinking and self-expression.

Critical thinking involves the thoughtful application of criteria to a problematic situation. The development of the intellectual tools for quality thinking is done within the model of direct instruction as students are engaged in solving meaningful problems derived from learning objectives set out in the curriculum.

The evolution of the program of instruction at FFCA is revealing the potential of the direct instruction model to effectively integrate a variety of different teaching strategies. The development of critically thoughtful habits of mind and the introduction of critical challenges into the model provide a stimulating environment for learning that engages students and makes their experience more meaningful. ■

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*Garfield Gini-Newman is a critical thinking facilitator with the Critical Thinking Consortium ([www.tc2.ca](http://www.tc2.ca)), and a lecturer with OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) at the University of Toronto.*

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# Measuring Student Engagement - Impacting Results

By Steve Bayus and Ulana Soletsky

**G**reater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division (GSACRD) is embracing the Gallup Path™ research that measures staff and student engagement. The Gallup Path™ highlights the need to have the best talent in the role of teacher and principal, the importance of developing the strengths of staff and students, and managing engagement in the workplace and the learning environment. The path identifies factors that are predictable and malleable. When managed well, these factors impact the desired outcomes of the school division.

GSACRD is now in the fourth year of measuring staff engagement using Gallup's Q12 Climate/Culture Survey. Gallup research demonstrates the direct link between staff engagement and student engagement which results in learning and higher levels of achievement. Last year, GSACRD extended the use of the Gallup organization research tools to measure *student engagement, hope and wellbeing*.

The division has adopted Gallup's definition of engagement as having a 'psychological and emotional' attachment to their school, their teacher and their schoolwork. This definition implies a belief that to truly engage a person, one must invoke a sense of emotion within the person that goes beyond satisfaction.

This research reinforces the impact teachers and support staffs have on students in the classroom. Creating excellent workplaces and learning environments is positively linked to student outcomes. Measuring staff engagement with the Q12 Climate/Culture survey tool allows the division to use results, to initiate action plans with staff to improve their school workplace, and to create a positive impact on student achievement.

Following a pilot study with students in 2010-2011, the division coordinated the use of the Gallup Student Poll (GSP) tool with students in grades five, eight and 11 to provide a broader measure of student engagement throughout the division. This research was

facilitated through a web-based survey tool and provided immediate feedback for schools and the division.

The GSP provides measurements for three areas of student thinking and emotion:

- *Engagement* – the involvement in and enthusiasm for school;
- *Hope* – the ideas and energy students have for the future—the student's belief that they will graduate (this is more predictive of success than traditional methods); and
- *Wellbeing* – how students think about and experience their lives.

Engagement, Hope and Wellbeing impact student grades, achievement scores, retention, and future employment and are factors that can be reliably measured.

In addition, to the Gallup Poll quantitative results, the division's AISI (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement) team also provided opportunities for students to share their experiences, ideas and views about their education through local 'Speak-Out' forums and student interviews to provide some qualitative data. The results were tabulated, analyzed and provided to the schools.



The most critical part of all these measures is the analysis of results at each school. Staff will use the data to develop strategic action plans focused on motivating students and providing the best school environment to improve learning and achievement.

At the time of this writing, the division GSP results have been shared with the board of trustees and local school results will be shared and discussed with students, staff and school councils. ■

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*Thank you to Carol Bruineman, GSACRD communications manager for editing assistance.*

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*To see references for this article, you can email kcornelsen@matrixgroupinc.net.*



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New technology presents new opportunities and new challenges for educators. The growing scope of, and ease of access to the Internet, presents an exciting tool for education. But this same ability also creates challenges for administrators as students are now interacting in ways which can be difficult to monitor and manage.

One fundamental challenge posed by interaction over the Internet is its sheer pervasiveness in students' lives. Statistics back up the importance that your students now place upon their technological lives:

- 73 per cent of 12 to 17-year olds have at least one social networking profile (Pew, 2010);
- 51 per cent of teens check social networks more than one time per day. 22 per cent of teens check social networks 10 or more times per day (Common Sense Media, 2009); and
- 77 per cent of 8 to 15-year olds said they would rather give up TV than give up the Internet (Pangea Media and YPulse, 2009).

Use of these technologies does mean that students are increasingly communicating in ways which are outside the eyes of adult supervision and often with a cloak of anonymity. One result is the increasing prevalence of "cyber-bullying". Bullying can now take place at great speed, with wide distribution and, given students' heavy use of these technologies

in their social lives, in a manner that may prove impossible for the student to avoid.

A 2005 survey of 264 junior high school students in a Canadian city disclosed that approximately 25 per cent of the respondents had been victims of cyber-bullying and almost 17 per cent had bullied others using electronic communication tools. Statistics such as these suggest a growing obligation to take positive steps to stem this tide.

Section 45(8) of Alberta's School Act creates a statutory duty for school boards to provide a safe and caring school environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours.

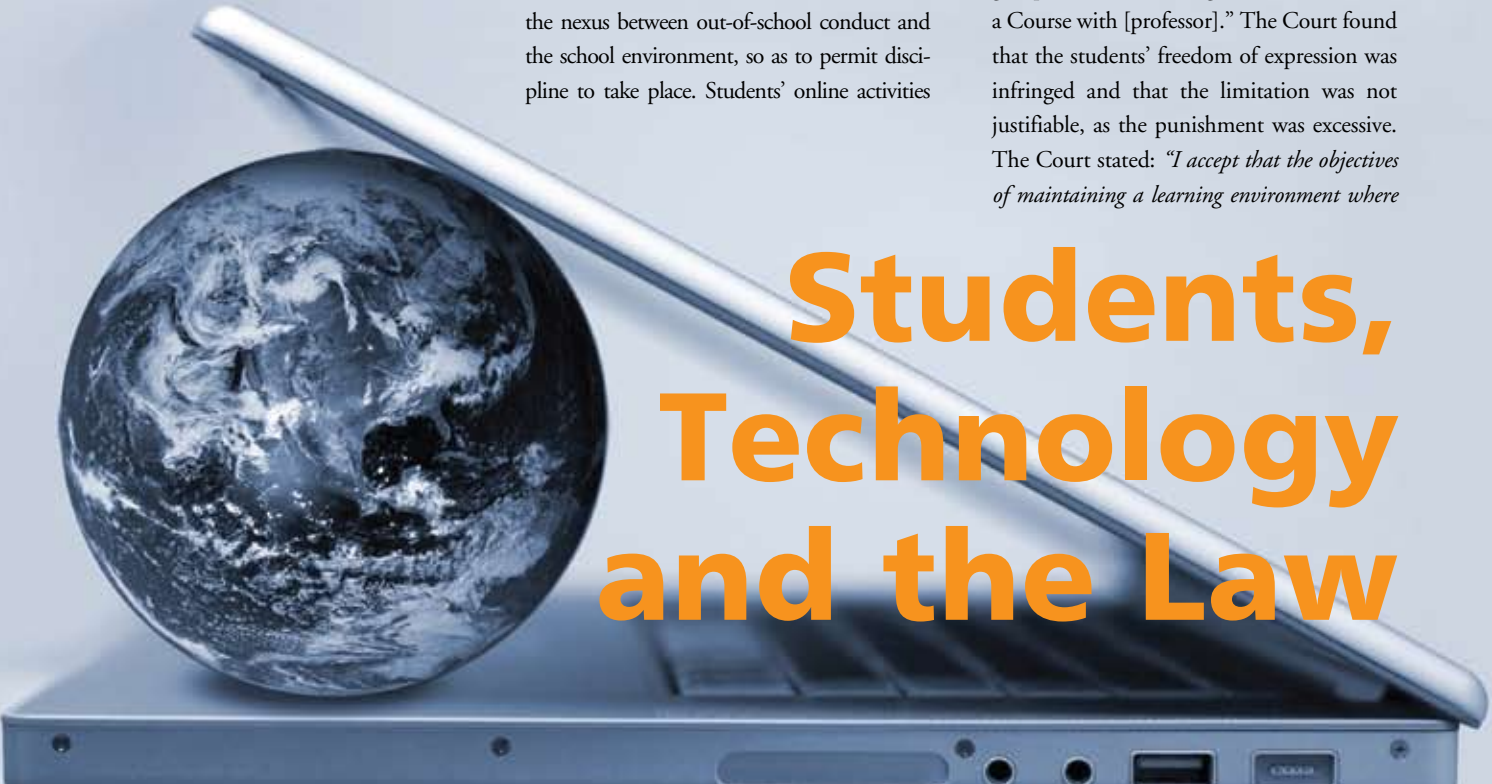
School principals also have a statutory duty under section 20(f) to "maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board." Further, teachers have a statutory duty under section 18(1)(f) of the Act to "maintain, under the direction of the principal, order and discipline among the students while they are in the school or on the school grounds and while they are attending or participating in activities sponsored or approved by the board."

The extent to which schools can regulate out-of-school conduct is dependent upon the connection between the conduct and its effect upon the school community. This principle applies to online activity outside of school. In the cyber-bullying context, the creation of a toxic environment between students may create the nexus between out-of-school conduct and the school environment, so as to permit discipline to take place. Students' online activities

targeting school staff must also be the subject of concern from administrators, in accordance with the board's statutory obligations towards its employees. These include the obligation to provide a safe and healthy work environment under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the requirement to prevent a poisoned work environment which effectively discriminates on a protected ground under the Alberta Human Rights Act.

The decision to discipline for student online activity outside of school is one which must balance school administrators' obligations to maintain a safe school environment with the students' right to freedom of expression under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Therefore, it is essential for administrators to carefully consider the justifying rationale for the steps to be taken and to consider whether the harm sought to be prevented warrants a limitation on freedom of expression.

The recent Alberta Court of Queen's Bench case in *Pridgen v. University of Calgary*, 2010 ABQB 644, provides an interesting example of what may occur when steps taken by school administration to punish students for expression is seen as "overreaching"—albeit in a post-secondary setting. In that case, two undergraduate students were found guilty of non-academic misconduct and placed on probation as a result of negative comments written about a professor on a publicly accessible Facebook group titled "I NO Longer Fear Hell, I Took a Course with [professor]." The Court found that the students' freedom of expression was infringed and that the limitation was not justifiable, as the punishment was excessive. The Court stated: *"I accept that the objectives of maintaining a learning environment where*



# Students, Technology and the Law

*there is respect and dignity for all and in protecting its reputation as an institution are meritorious and accord with the values of a free and democratic society. However, I am satisfied that the measures adopted...of disciplining the [students] for making critical comments regarding [the professor] on the Facebook wall were excessive...I cannot accept that expression in the form of criticism of one's professor must be restricted in order to accomplish the objective of maintaining an appropriate learning environment."*

The Pridgen case has been appealed to the Alberta Court of Appeal on a number of grounds and we await that higher decision. Regardless, I would not suggest that the Pridgen case be taken by Alberta's school administrators as arguing for untrammelled student freedom of expression. For one, the permissible extent of student expression, including the negative critique of teachers and classmates, will clearly be greater in a post-secondary setting than in a primary or secondary school setting.

Perhaps more importantly, the case shows that context will be paramount in justifying appropriate discipline. The speech in Pridgen was perhaps too tongue-in-cheek to be truly defamatory or tarnishing of the professor's reputation and such a case might be viewed by a court as simply a bruised ego. However, in an appropriate case, there is no question that a school administrator can view the student's actions as harmful to discipline in the school,

the school environment, the staffs' safe and respectful workplace, or the reputations of the school, the board or its staff.

If challenged in the courts, school administrators will need to marshal the evidence that their policies and actions are guided by legitimate concern for school and student safety. Because of the rapidly changing nature of technology, it is important to review such policies frequently to ensure that they are neither inflexible nor out-of-date. For instance, is the use of "smartphones" with Internet and/or picture capability covered? Appropriate

policies ensure both that inappropriate student activity is expressly covered by some school rule, as well as the crucial function of educating students about the school's expectations about technology use. Put simply, if students would rather give up television than the Internet, the education of ethical technology users may be of paramount importance. ■

*Jeremy Schick, and the Legal Services department of ASBA, assist school boards across the province in developing policy, handling discipline issues, and other education law matters.*



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# Creating, Maintaining and Role-Modeling a Healthy Lifestyle

**W**orkplace wellness is about creating a supportive social network for staff members, modeling healthy behaviours for students, establishing factors that keep employees and students healthy and happy at work and school, all while ensuring the provision of a safe and injury-free work environment.

Both employers and employees share the responsibility of creating a healthy workplace. Creating supportive environments at work plays a vital role in encouraging good health and assists individuals in making the healthy choice an easy choice. An increased focus on healthy lifestyle behaviours in the school environment is an ideal way to ensure that children and youth observe and adopt active and nutritious lifestyles.

There are a number of benefits that result from workplace wellness programs:

- Increased awareness of health among students and staff;
- Increased likelihood that students and staff will maintain a healthy weight;
- Decreased sick time; and
- Increased productivity among staff members and students.

## Launching workplace wellness in your district

A workplace wellness program can involve the entire district or be specific to school sites. Getting started involves creating an overall plan and outlining objectives for the program. The following elements may guide you in the success of your program:

- Gaining support from your leadership team;
- Creating a wellness team that is passionate about a healthy workplace;
- Distributing a survey to determine staff interests on health and health activities;
- Developing objectives of the program;
- Evaluating; and
- Celebrating successes.

## What are schools currently doing to promote health?

There are already a number of successful wellness committees in school districts across the province. Schools have developed activities for staff and

students that focus on the three main elements of healthy living—healthy eating, active living, and emotional well-being. Some examples of activities that schools are engaged in to promote and sustain the healthy work environment include:

Healthy Eating	Active Living	Emotional Well-being
Healthy snacks at staff meetings/ in staff room and at birthdays	Running/ walking club	After-school massage (15 minute sessions provided by local massage therapist)
Vending machine contents replaced with healthier alternatives	Staff vs students noon-hour floor hockey challenge	Wellness news: dedicate 10 minutes to each staff meeting agenda to introduce new activities and celebrate wellness activity successes
Recipe swap	Staff volleyball game	Wellness board: a place in the staffroom where staff members can write 'feel good' messages about other staff members
Healthy potluck challenge	Morning boot camp	Friendly Fridays: staff member responsible to provide joke of the week
Staff/ student food group challenge (following Canada's Food Group, staff and students keep track of their daily intake for one week). Winning class gets a smoothie party.	After-school personal trainer (students train teachers, part of physical activity learning)	Class Blog: staff and students create blog about participation in healthy activities

Many schools and districts have already recognized the link between workplace health and overall staff and student health. Workplace health does not need to be an overwhelming investment of human and/or financial resources. Get creative, use your motivation, and have fun in launching, re-introducing, and/or maintaining your workplace wellness programs. ■

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# Lack of space a “textbook” case

In my experience working with educational institutions, I have learned that most of our school administrators experience problems with disorganized and overloaded book storage shelving, inadequate gym storage areas, music rooms without secure storage space for instruments, and document and paper file storage that is not efficient. Perhaps some or all of the above issues have been impeding your ability to gain the most productivity from your available storage spaces.

One particular challenge that comes to mind, was at a central Alberta High School that needed to store their textbook collection through the summer months while cleaning, maintenance and various repairs were done to the building.

## The Challenge

They needed to accommodate all the textbooks in one room, and were using a combination of existing wood shelves, millwork, and cupboards. Their volume of books was greater than the room capacity. Further more, the amount of contract workers in the building during the summer months posed a constant risk of damage or theft from the collection if it was spread into several unsecured areas.

## The Solution

To replace their old, inefficient shelving with a Mizer brand mobile shelving system. This mobile system more than tripled the capacity of the room, and allowed for future growth. The collection is now secure, and is all contained in one room, making it more convenient and productive for sorting and repairing the books throughout the summer.



Heather Storie, School Project Specialist with a Mizer Mobile Storage System from Foothills Systems.

All too often, disorganization leads to lost, misfiled or even stolen books, equipment, and instruments.

Do you have storage/space management issues that have been impeding your ability to gain the most productivity from your space?

Contact Heather Storie, your School Project Specialist at Foothills Systems.



Heather Storie  
School Project Specialist  
1-800-789-5956  
hstorie@stelterr.com  
www.foothillssystems.com

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