



PrincipalConnections

Fall 2024 • Volume 28 • Issue 1

The magazine of Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario



PEOPLE FIRST

CAROL CAMPBELL

*Valuing the Humanity of
the Education Profession*

SIMON BREAKSPEAR

The Pruning Principle

EMMA LIND

Breaking Up With Perfectionism



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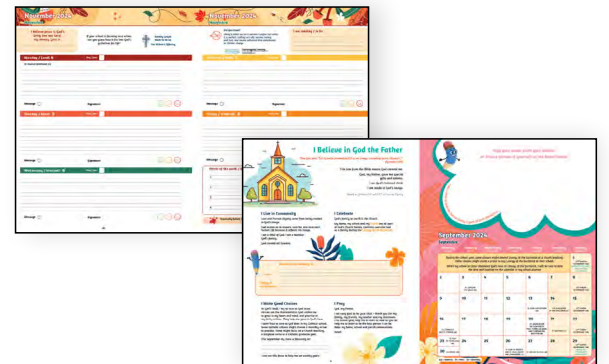
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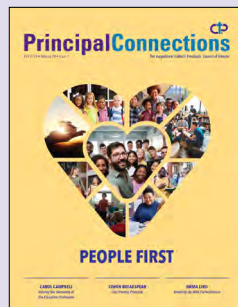
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Cover design by Erika Futuyama

We thank all those who contributed to this issue. Please note, however, that the opinions and views expressed are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of CPCO. Similarly, the acceptance of advertising does not imply CPCO endorsement.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40035635

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

James McDade

Embracing People First

In the realm of education, the term "leadership" often conjures images of authority figures making tough decisions or managing complex systems. However, at its core, effective leadership in schools extends far beyond our administrative duties. It encompasses a profound understanding of people – the students, teachers, staff and parents who form the heart of a school community.

The concept of "People First" emerges as a guiding principle, emphasizing the paramount importance of social-emotional skills in nurturing a thriving school community. As the Gospel of Mark teaches us, the essence of Servant Leadership as taught by Jesus, emphasizes humility, service and sacrifice for the well-being of others. Servant Leadership and a People First approach are conceptually inseparable.

At the forefront of People First Servant Leadership lies the recognition of academic success and emotional well-being being one and the same. School leaders who prioritize social-emotional skills understand that fostering a supportive and inclusive environment is foundational to unlocking students' full potential. As leaders, we must recognize the diverse backgrounds, experiences and needs within our communities, and actively cultivate empathy, compassion and cultural competence to address them effectively.

As effective school leaders, we need to lead by example, demonstrating authentic care and respect for the individuals we serve. It is essential to prioritize open communication, actively listen to diverse perspectives and cultivate trust through transparent decision-making processes. By building meaningful connections and rapport with students, teachers and families, we can create a sense of belonging and safety where everyone feels valued and empowered to thrive.

Often labelled "soft skills;" emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and relationship-building cannot be merely supplemental to effective leadership – they are central to it. As school leaders, when we focus on these skills we are better equipped to navigate

the complexities of interpersonal dynamics, resolve conflicts constructively and foster collaboration among stakeholders. When we focus on our "soft skills" we build genuine collaboration, which is essential for driving positive change and innovation within the school community. People First leadership extends well beyond school walls, encompassing partnerships with external stakeholders and the broader community. Effective school leaders leverage their social-emotional skills to forge meaningful alliances with local organizations, businesses and civic leaders, enriching the educational experience and resources available to their students.

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, the need for People First Servant Leadership has never been greater. As schools grapple with unprecedented challenges – from the impacts of the staffing crisis and the countless other issues affecting the education sector – leaders, who prioritize social-emotional skills and utilize a People First Servant approach, are uniquely positioned to navigate uncertainty with resilience and empathy.

The essence of effective school leadership lies in putting People First. By prioritizing our servitude, social-emotional skills and cultivating a culture of empathy, collaboration and inclusivity, school leaders can create environments where every member of the community thrives academically, emotionally and socially. In doing so, leaders lay the foundation for a brighter future, where education becomes not only a pathway to success but also a journey of personal growth and fulfillment for all.

On behalf of everyone at CPCO, we wish you a year filled with inspiration, innovation and success as you lead our students to new heights. Your dedication and vision are truly appreciated. May this school year bring you joy, accomplishment and the satisfaction of seeing your hard work make a positive impact on our students' lives. Your support and leadership are invaluable.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.
Philippians 4:13

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Tilia Cruz



Understanding the Social-Emotional Condition of Servant Leadership

It is with a great deal of excitement that I, as the new Executive Director for CPCO, welcome our Catholic school administrators to a new school year.

Like some of you, I am embarking on a new pathway in the career of Catholic leadership, as other Catholic administrators are returning to the role they have been embracing for a while. No matter our individual situations, I know we will assume these roles with grace and humility, understanding that these roles come with several challenges and opportunities to respond to the call of servant leadership.

Building on the work of previous CPCO Executive Directors, my vision is to continue the positive elements that enrich the role of our Principals/Vice-Principals and to continue to advance the vision and mission of CPCO at a time where the work of the school administrator is challenged by increased stressors and unprecedented pressures.

The vocation of a Catholic school leader has always been based on a foundation of serving our communities with dignity, compassion and a keen sense of purpose. We are called to be resilient and steadfast when faced with tribulations. As the workload intensifies, we are reminded that it is our personal social-emotional condition that will help us navigate the

issues and concerns that are part of the everyday reality in our school communities. We need to reflect on our own social-emotional needs to remain mentally healthy to carry out our duties and responsibilities.

As we model the use of strong social-emotional skills to our students, staff and parents, the focus on empathy and compassion becomes evident in our interactions. We may have many examples where these social norms are not always reciprocated, however, we have a moral imperative to not allow these situations to tear down, or give up on, the strong Catholic history we have built.

The role of Catholic Principal and Vice-Principal is not one done in isolation but one conducted in communion with others. We need to recognize our strengths and use our emotional skills of compassion and empathy to support each other during the school year ahead. We cannot do the job alone but rather we are encouraged to rely on our Catholic 'village' to stand together and walk forth, dealing with the challenges ahead.

May this coming year bring you a more balanced work-life experience with a focus on family, filled with professional successes and supportive of personal achievements.

As we model the use of strong social-emotional skills to our students, staff and parents, the focus on empathy and compassion becomes evident in our interactions.



FROM THE EDITOR

Deirdre Kinsella Biss

A People-Centric Approach

People First is an inclusive approach to education that intentionally prioritizes the well-being and needs of the people in our school communities. It is all about the humanity we bring to our work, placing understanding and kindness towards others at the heart of what we do. At its core, educational change is about people and the relationships between people. So, our consideration of others, our attitudes and our soft skills really matter!

As education leaders we are in constant search of ways to improve our schools. Transformation begins with a school culture that values a partnership mindset. Recognizing the importance of relationships, valuing the joy of teaching and learning, engaging in authentic professional collaboration and appreciating the emotions of others is essential. By encouraging a genuine desire in people to make a difference, people in a school community are empowered and positioned to make change happen.

Connection is key. Let human connection be the cornerstone of your professional work. Genuine interest in others, respectful interactions, kind words and concern for personal well-being are all strategies that place people first and serve to deepen a sense of belonging in our profession. *Valuing the Humanity of the Education Profession* written by Carol Campbell, addresses the need for improving the status, respect for, working conditions and work-life balance of the profession.

Build a culture of growth. Acknowledge people. Let them know they are seen and heard. Recognize their growth potential. Engage in authentic dialogue and two-way discussions. Listen to connect. Tracey Ezard's article, *Fostering a Culture of Professional Authentic Dialogue and Feedback*, highlights the importance of deep discussion, openness and partnership. She shares the SPEAK Framework, which offers ideas on how to develop quality conversations in your school.

Recognize how perfectionism and polarization affect your community. Mistakes are a key part of learning. Emma Lind reflects on the current culture of hierarchy that exists in our schools and discusses how a job well done has always been perceived as a job completed without error. In *Breaking Up with Perfectionism*, she discusses the role perfectionism plays in polarizing the true development of community, collaboration and compassion.

Be aware of the additive trap. Simon Breakspears' article *The Pruning Principle*, deals with the default assumption that pursuing improvement for your students and staff implicitly means doing *more*. The Pruning Principle involves listening, learning, revising and being willing to remove and abandon strategies that don't work. Learning how to intentionally stop doing things is a new way of thinking about change.

Re-imagine schools and explore new possibilities. Author Gillian Judson suggests that we cannot create what we cannot imagine. To build on this idea, CPCO invited 17 international education thought leaders to share their insights on the topic of schools and people development. *Transforming Education: A People First Approach*, shares ideas that can inspire dialogue, encourage reflection and promote next steps for the people in your school community.

People are at the heart of Catholic education. A *People First* approach to education is not just about policies and systems; it's about recognizing the unique needs, aspirations and potential of every learner. Promoting the joy of learning and teaching is rooted in how we make people feel when they are engaged in their roles and doing their jobs. By being in authentic relationship and dialogue with the students, staff and parents in our schools, we cultivate an education reality in Ontario that truly serves the people it aims to empower. This year, make your school story a story about people.



Valuing the Humanity of the Education Profession

By Carol Campbell

What would it involve to truly value and centre the humanity of teachers and school leaders in education policy and practice? Recently, the UN Secretary General’s High-level Panel on the Teaching Profession¹ proposed recommendations to respond to a global crisis in the teaching profession. I had the privilege of being asked to write a background paper on the imperative of humanity² – I outline key points in this article.

Humanity Of and For the Education Profession

Definitions of humanity include “the qualities and characteristics of people” and “understanding and

kindness towards other people”³. As we maintain:

While it may seem obvious to state that teachers are people and professionals, the humanity of individual teachers and the collective teaching profession is not always central to policy debates and educational reforms. This is despite the fact that the policies, conditions and reforms of education systems and their institutions, including schools, affect teachers’ professional lives and can have an impact on their personal lives as well. This is particularly the case for teacher well-being. (Campbell & Lewis, 2023, p.1).



The Pruning Principle

Mastering the Art of Strategic Subtraction

By Simon Breakspear

Are you busier than you were three years ago? For how many years would you say this has been true? When we examine the sheer number of programs, projects and commitments we find ourselves tied to in our schools, it's easy to see why the overload is real. We have found ourselves in a state of what I call frenzied stagnation, where doing more is the default, yet it's not having the impact we hope it will. As one educational leader in my local school systems said to me recently, "I've been flat out all week. I'm exhausted, and I don't think I've even achieved anything." I know he's not alone. We're dealing with 'The Additive Trap.'

The Additive Trap

The Additive Trap in education refers to a tendency to engage in improvement by defaulting to adding one more thing. We are like a calculator with only one function: addition. Our individual and team rhythms, tools, templates, protocols and conversational norms are focused on how best to improve our schools through additive actions. The default assumption is that pursuing improvement for our students, staff, and systems implicitly means doing *more*. We have rhythms and routines for school improvement to ensure that every term, year- or longer-term planning cycle, we carry on with all the things we've already committed to, while adding projects or initiatives that theoretically will finally give us the breakthrough we seek.

The question is, how can we learn to *deliberately stop doing things*? How might we collectively interrupt the additive trap our schools and systems seem stuck in?

The Pruning Principle

Normally, in my applied research and development work I turn to the psychological literature to seek insights that could inform a workable solution in schools. However, this time, the most helpful approach came from a most unexpected field: horticulture. Prepare your secateurs, because it turns out the same principles and practices of pruning that apply to dynamic living ecosystems have broader relevance.

These concepts are unbelievably useful for those of us trying to work through how to get beyond a state of overload in educational settings and start making long-term meaningful progress in our schools and systems. At the core of pruning logic is a flip in the fundamental logic of educational impact: that to do less, you can achieve more over the long term. I define the Pruning Principle as – *deliberately cutting off or cutting back is essential to cultivating long-term vitality and impact.*

Pruning in education is all about mastering the art of strategic subtraction. In doing so, we redirect energy and resources towards the areas of the highest marginal impact, stimulate new desired growth and reshape for health and longevity.

Pruning isn't the same as simply not adding – or declaring that you will not add for a while. Pruning is not simple trimming. Trimming involves giving the plant a 'haircut' mostly for cosmetic reasons. Pruning is a deliberative, active and intentional process of subtraction. It involves a deep commitment to the long-term health and vitality of

Breaking Up With Perfectionism

By Emma Lind

I remember once rambling on to my therapist about all my anxieties and stressors, the pressure I was under and how inadequate I felt. “Ah,” she said, calmly and clearly. “You’re struggling with perfectionism.” Perfectionism?! She may have well grown a second head. Aghast, I said, without a hint of irony, “How could I be struggling with perfectionism when I’m so clear about the fact that I’m not perfect?”

It’s the kind of anecdote that makes me laugh now, but my reaction was sincere. I thought perfectionists walked around insisting everything be perfect. It never occurred to me that they walked around feeling inadequate and flawed. Until that moment, no one had ever named perfectionism to me. More importantly, no one had ever taught me the merits of a graceful error, the transferable skill of humility, and the essential task of embracing my own vulnerability.

In 2020, North American society experienced a galvanizing political event after the murder of George Floyd. While Black Lives Matter activists had been organizing for a decade to bring attention to police violence against Black men, the public outcry in 2020 reached the mainstream in an unprecedented way. One of the most ubiquitous expressions of this was the “black square” meme on social media. I remember days where all my social media contacts looked indistinguishable from each other, everyone replacing their profile pictures with black squares as an act of solidarity. On one level, it was exciting to see such broad support for the BLM movement. The unity was inspiring, particularly when we were all so isolated from each other during Covid lockdowns. On another level, the use of the black square on social media sometimes drew scrutiny from cynics who decried the use of the black square as just another example of empty, performative slacktivism.

I remember participants in anti-racism training expressing dismay at the criticism they received on

social media after participating in the black square action. They felt they had embarrassed themselves, that their reputations may have been tarnished. Some worried they wouldn’t be able to participate in activism again until they learned how to do it better.

We’re living through another similar galvanizing political moment now. The conflict in Israel/Palestine has polarized people across the globe. In North America, there has been intensified rates of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Diasporic communities are grieving lost or threatened loved ones





Fostering a Culture of Authentic Professional Dialogue and Feedback

By Tracey Ezard

In nurturing educators and leaders to enhance their capabilities, building a culture centred on professional development is crucial. This growth unfolds not only in response to coaching discussions on development but also through deep collaborative learning within teams of colleagues. Instead of merely containing feedback, a thriving professional culture embodies growth and learning.

A Culture of Growth, Beyond Feedback

For many educators, the term "feedback" carries negative connotations, often interpreted solely as criticism rather than constructive observation and an opportunity for growth. Schools where professionals are acknowledged as continual learners are creating a culture of continuous capacity building. Such environments have a spirited energy, founded on collaboration, trust and learning. These schools have what I call 'The Buzz.' They are

dynamic places to work, characterized by vibrant learning environments. The palpable sense of purpose fosters an eagerness to explore new approaches to transformative work. Crucially, the quality of dialogue is rich and exploratory, fostering both collective and individual reflections on practice.

At the heart of these discussions lies the impact on students, who thrive in environments where educators are dedicated to making a difference in their learning journey. Educators who grow and learn together generate momentum and collective impact. Strong learning loops and deep dialogue are critical to this success.

Authentic Dialogue - The Cornerstone of Quality Feedback

Authentic dialogue requires a level of courage and vulnerability. For people to step into a deep level of

What's Your Story?

By Jill Gowdie

There is a small Catholic school I'm fond of where the front office staff member has a name badge that identifies her as 'Director of First Impressions.'

How splendid! How true!

When any parent or visitor steps into a Catholic school, the story they step into begins with the first encounter – and most times, the first encounter is with the front office staff. Connection can be locked in or lost in that first encounter.

In visiting many schools over the years, I can tell you what the school culture is like from the encounter in the first 10 minutes. It begins with the way anyone walking through the door is acknowledged, welcomed, invited and attended to. It is no accident that the nature of that initial experience is most usually amplified throughout the school community in the way leaders, teachers and students engage – or not.

When good culture works well, everything builds from first moments, first experiences.

This is true of every school community. And you will hear the same descriptors used in schools across all sectors when communicating good culture: welcoming, respectful, inclusive, caring and with a leadership that enables students and staff to strive for excellence and opportunity for everyone. We see this in the marketing of schools, the mottos of colleges, their vision statements and mission documents.

The descriptor words used are designed to shorthand a narrative about the school's culture that both picks up on what parents and society want, and what schooling environments seek to offer.

Philosopher Byung-Chul Han believes however that there has been a shift and what is really on offer is what he calls



'story-selling.'¹ His provocation is that despite all the hype around narrative, we in fact live in a post-narrative time and the real art of narrative is being lost.

'Story-selling' is focussed on buy-in. It is about presenting a snapshot of experiences that trigger an emotive response according to audience desires. Han explains it can be identified by its exploitation of an appetite for individualistic ideologies and an appeal to self-expression. It is about presenting a story with enough personal triggers for audience buy-in. More than this, it is predicated on the assumption that data is what proves a story to be true with an overall impact of the entire dynamic of story-selling being to create further disenchantment with and in the world.

We are caught in a slipstream without being aware of it, where the energy is invested in creating a story that can be 'sold' rather than living a story deeply enough to be 'told.'

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION: A People First Approach

17 Thought Leaders Weigh In

Embracing a *People First* approach to education transcends policies and systems; it involves acknowledging the distinct needs, aspirations and potential of each learner within our school community. By prioritizing the joy of learning and teaching, we can cultivate an environment where people feel connected and fulfilled in their roles.

CPCO reached out to 17 international education thought leaders on the topic of people development. Their insights provide valuable ideas for ensuring the success of students, teachers and parents in our schools, now and in the future. We hope this article inspires dialogue, encourages reflection and promotes next steps for the people in your school community. [CP](#)

“What aspect of people development do you think is important for our school leaders to focus on right now?”



THOMAS GROOME

PEDAGOGY OF PARTICIPATION

Think for Themselves

It is imperative that Catholic education empower students *to think for themselves, but not by or for themselves alone*. Here I’m suggesting the epistemology – the ways of knowing – that should distinguish a Catholic school. First, we must encourage and nurture students in the disposition to think for themselves, to be able to consider data – including that from their own experience – and then to come to their personal understandings, judgments and decisions about it (Lonergan).

Such critical thinking should not be done by themselves alone but rather in conversation, in community and ever considering the “knowledge” of others, that of student colleagues and then the legacy of history – the academic disciplines, secular and spiritual. Rather than knowing for themselves alone, students must be taught to consider and care for others, promoting compassion and justice for all. This points to a pedagogy of participation and conversation that engages students as agents of their own knowing, forming their self-knowledge and their social consciousness. As Dewey advised, “Little is learned by abundant lecturing.”



JENNI DONOHO

COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Foster Shared Beliefs

School leaders can help teachers develop collective efficacy – the shared belief that educators can positively influence student outcomes through combined efforts. When everyone believes they can make a difference, they are more likely to work to turn that belief into reality. Individual and collective efficacy are not fixed traits but rather dynamic beliefs that can be influenced by school leaders.

A culture of efficacy extends to students as well. They are more likely to develop growth mindsets and take ownership of learning when they see their teachers believing in their ability to succeed.

By intentionally fostering efficacy, principals help teachers think differently about their own capacity and the collective ability of their school to make a meaningful difference in student learning, creating a powerful culture of growth and success. School leaders can help teachers understand how their beliefs shape their reality.

Changing the Narrative

By Jody Carrington

Here's the truth: if we're not okay, the students we teach don't stand a chance. That's a big statement for an institution that has long focused mostly (if not solely) on the needs of the students.

Understandably, the institution of education was designed to create a space to teach kids. A focus on curriculum, specifically establishing the appropriate developmental

levels of literacy and numeracy, has been an understandable primary priority. In Canada, at least, we do have access to some of the finest curricula in the world. What remains true, however, is that if students and teachers are dysregulated and disconnected, their capacity to learn and to teach are significantly compromised.

In just one generation – no doubt your teaching career alone – we have witnessed a significant shift in what humans have to deal with in this world. We are the first generation of adults who have access to social media. You are the first generation of educators who students have this much access to; they (and their families) can access you anytime. For example, they can send emails at any time of the day or night and regardless of whether we look at them, we are still accessible. The issue is our bodies know that. Our cortisol level knows that.

It's very difficult for our neurochemistry to take a break and to truly have some reprieve from the constant inundation of noise that we've received, particularly in the last decade.

Regardless of these significant changes in this big world, we're still playing by a set of rules that was established for a world that no longer exists.

Those rules sound something like this: you make a good choice, I'll reward you and you don't make a good choice, there will be





Cultivating Imagination in Leadership

By Gillian Judson

“True leadership springs from the courage to envision new possibilities and the steadfastness to turn them into realities.”

Dr. Soraya Sablo Sutton*

Why Imagination?

About six years ago, we began to research imagination and its role in the context of leadership. Soon after beginning this work, we felt *uncomfortable*.

We recognize the highly complex and volatile nature of educational leadership today; in a world rife with social and ecological injustice, people turn to education for a solution. We, like many others, acknowledge the need to radically change a system that does not support all learners and has explicitly and implicitly led to ecological crises. Alarming, we noticed that increasing calls to “re-imagine” schools and to “envision new possibilities” for education are not matched with practical support for doing so.

Digging deeper, we learned that imagination is widely misunderstood and largely neglected in leadership practice and leadership training (Judson, 2020, 2023). *Even if* tools for cultivating imagination were widely understood, few leaders would consider it worthwhile to learn to use them. This is a problem. As leader and scholar Dr. George Theoharis notes, “Imagination in leadership isn’t optional; it’s essential for confronting the equity and justice issues in our schools head-on.” As is often the case for action, our own *discomfort*, became our motivation to address this gap in leadership theory and practice.

To address misunderstanding around imagination’s roles in leadership, disrupt the misconception that imagination is optional in leadership and provide practical support for cultivating this vital capacity, we have worked to amplify the voices, research and practice of leaders. In 2023, we published the book *Cultivating Imagination in Leadership: Transforming Schools and Communities* (Teachers College Press), in which 22 leaders explicitly discuss how imagination contributes to their leadership practices. A theme emerging from that work was the role

of imagination in leading for social and ecological justice. This is the focus of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded knowledge dissemination project entitled *Cultivating Imagination: Leading for a Just Future* (www.cultivateimagination.ca). Twenty practising leaders and leadership researchers explicitly share why imagination is required in their work and what practical tools they use in their communities to cultivate it.

Tools that Cultivate Imagination

What is unique about this work is that it illuminates particular “cognitive tools” that cultivate imagination. For decades, imagination and cognitive tools have been explored in the context of pedagogy and an approach to teaching called Imaginative Education (see Egan 1997, 2005; Egan & Judson, 2015; Judson & Dougherty, 2023). Our leaders indicate how these tools, which bring emotion, imagination and knowledge together, help them in a myriad of ways. They allow leaders to connect with others and create shared meaning and ideas. They help to crack solidified ways of thinking and open up space for hope.

In the *Cultivating Imagination* project, you’ll hear leaders speak of how they employ **story and the story-form** to engage and inspire, how **the body** is the originating source of imagination and meaning, how **play-full practices** and **what if’ing** open space for newness, how dissonating or tapping into a **sense of rebellion** help to illuminate untenable practices or policies, how focusing on **metaphor** can reveal hidden meaning, and how **changing the context** for thinking and learning can suddenly invite new perspectives. (Learn more about cognitive tools on the Resource page of the Cultivating Imagination project website: www.cultivateimagination.ca/resources/)

The leaders acknowledge how cultivating imagination is a way of being as a leader and is transformative. For example, rather than simply seeking to use story, vivid imagery or metaphor to “get people on board” for a new policy, storytelling and imagery-evocation is more profoundly a catalyst in community settings to co-create a shared vision and plans for action.

Five Habits of



By Jim Knight

“If we learn to open our hearts, anyone, including the people who drive us crazy, can be our teacher.”
Pema Chödrön, Buddhist author and teacher

When John Dickson, author of the book *Humilitas*, told a friend he was writing about humility, his friend responded snarkily, “Well, John, at least you have the objective distance from the subject!” My friends could make that same comment about me. I’m especially interested in the topic because I recognize a need to foster more humility in myself.

Humility, though, isn’t just a personal growth area for me. I want to learn about humility because there’s ample evidence that it’s important in learning and especially in coaching. Most experts in leadership, positive psychology, self-help and religion also identify humility as essential. When I ask coaches and administrators in my workshops to describe leaders who positively shaped their lives, humility is the trait that’s always mentioned. To lead, to persuade, to be a good person, to live a true and beautiful life, they say, we must be humble.

What Is Humility Anyway?

Humility is tricky to define. When I asked people on Twitter to define it, I got a variety of helpful responses. Respondents said, humility is: putting others ahead of

ourselves, listening before talking, caring and recognizing how small we are within the awesome grandeur of the cosmos. Some defined humility as being a partner not a controller or as having the courage to change our views based on what we learn from others. As @tech_and_tacos wrote on Twitter, “Humility involves putting aside pride, position and ego to connect with others and assist them in reaching their desired goals.” Humility is also risky; when we put others’ interests ahead of our own, sometimes our interests get overlooked.

We can gain a better understanding of the power of humility when we consider the alternative: arrogance. When we move through the world arrogantly, our pride and self-interest interfere with our ability to learn – if we’re sure we’re right, what can we learn from others? Arrogance damages relationships and limits our ability to influence people. As John Dickson noted in *Humilitas*, “It is a simple observational reality that the humble are frequently more persuasive and inspiring than the arrogant” (p.135).

Understanding what humility is not, is just as important as understanding what it is. Humility is not being a doormat. People will be less effective advocates for others if they fail to advocate for themselves. Humility isn’t a lack of confidence. Even a humble coach, for example, should be confident about the coaching cycle they’re leading and



Foundations for a Mentally Healthy School

By Judith Desjardins and Toni Lauzon

Principals and vice-principals know we are in the relationship business. Our focus is always on supporting these relationships to ensure that we are nurturing school environments where every student feels a sense of belonging, identity and wellness at school. Promoting nurturing environments is the everyday work that educators and school staff do within and beyond the curriculum – to welcome and include students, to understand them, to build mental health literacy, to promote mentally healthy habits, and to partner with families, students and community. School administrators support and sustain mentally healthy environments where every student is seen and valued by ensuring the key foundations are in place.

So where does one begin? Recently, School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) released an updated version of the *Leading Mentally Healthy Schools* ebook to provide guidance and resources to support school administrators. SMH-ON supports Ontario school boards to understand the key foundations for scalable and sustainable mental health practice. These foundations are important at the school level, as principals and vice-principals develop and sustain the conditions needed for the uptake of whole-school and class-wide mental health promotion programming.

There are seven key foundations; this article will highlight the first three.

Leadership commitment: It starts with you.

Leadership commitment is critical to aligning the school's core work and ensuring quality, consistency and sustainability in school mental health. School mental health practices that centre the needs and strengths of every student and celebrate diverse ways of knowing and promoting wellness – also known as identity affirming school mental health – require courageous leadership and the will to learn and do at the same time.

- This commitment to identity-affirming school mental health will foster positive learning environments for every student.
- When school administrators prioritize mental health and well-being, it sets the tone for others to follow suit. Educators and staff members feel valued for their work in this area and are encouraged to prioritize their students' mental health needs.

Engagement and collaboration: It's a team effort.

Promoting identity-affirming student mental health requires collective effort. Engaging with those most

Black Heritage & Excellence Series 2024

In Conversation with Anne-Marie King

CPCO's Black Heritage and Excellence Series focuses on the journeys and perspectives of Black Catholic education leaders. In this article, Anne-Marie King, Vice-Principal, Toronto Catholic District School Board, shares her thoughts with Bryan DeSousa a member of CPCO's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee.

What does Black Excellence and Heritage mean to you, and why take the time to celebrate?

I believe celebrating Black Heritage means acknowledging the achievements and contributions of Black men and women, past and present, in fields such as sports, arts, science, politics and education. It's important to recognize and celebrate these accomplishments throughout the year, not just in February. By learning about the outstanding achievements of Black men and women, children and youth can be inspired and realize they, too, can accomplish great things. It instils a sense of pride and belonging when you see someone who looks like you achieve something significant.

In a school setting, Black excellence is about encouraging Black students to utilize their talents and pursue their dreams. The media often portrays Blackness and Black youth in limited and stereotypical ways. It's of the utmost importance to change these perceptions and showcase diverse role models. This can help expand the aspirations and opportunities for Black youth.

What is your definition of "People First" in the school environment?

Putting "People First" means treating staff and students respectfully, prioritizing their needs and creating a welcoming, safe and positive environment. I believe



everyone comes with knowledge, experience, gifts and talents, and I value what they bring to the table. I do not see myself as an expert, but instead, more like a coach, bringing out the best in everyone. When staff and students feel their opinions matter and I see value in their lived experiences, we can co-create together. It empowers them and builds school morale. Putting 'People First' means showing up every day, ready to serve, creating a safe and caring environment where staff know I'm there to support them.

What are you doing in your school to create an environment of trust, health and mental well-being?

I prioritize direct, face-to-face communication over emails. This ensures staff concerns are heard and fosters a sense of trust and openness, making them feel valued and

CPCO's Newly Appointed Executive Director

By Antonella Rubino

On June 1, 2024, Tilia Cruz became the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario's seventh Executive Director. Tilia's many accomplishments are exceptional and have left an indelible impression on all those she encounters. But who is the person behind our newest Executive Director?

Tilia was born in Portugal and arrived in Canada at the age of four. She is the youngest of four sisters and grew up in the heart of Toronto. Immigrating to Canada came with its challenges, but Tilia's resourcefulness, wisdom and hard work carried her through difficult times. From an early age, she learned the importance of a solid education and of perseverance in the face of adversity.

Throughout Tilia's educational journey, the students' best interests and well-being were always at the core of all her decisions. Her extensive Special Education and ESL background, various leadership roles and her ability to make sound decisions have served her well and will continue to serve the CPCO community in her new role. As she departs from her current Support Services Advisor position, she is informed by the many cases where she fervently supported Associates from across the province.

Family is paramount to Tilia. She fiercely loves her husband, three sons and daughter-in-law. She is overjoyed to welcome her first grandchild and cannot wait for their arrival. Her boundless unconditional love is also felt by her extended family. She ensures quality time with them and captures these memories with creative scrapbooks, which she finds much pleasure in creating.



Tilia Cruz

Honouring traditions while laying the foundation for new paths is not only reflected on the home front but also will greatly benefit our organization. CPCO is built on the vision of many of our past leaders and Tilia will undoubtedly bring a sound, bold perspective in collaboration with the Executive Council.

Tilia is an avid traveller. Her sense of adventure and curiosity lead her to discover small hamlets, oceanfront getaways, enchanting European cities to name a few. She particularly enjoys talking to community members, learning about the culture and indulging in local cuisine. Tilia finds ways to appreciate the surroundings she visits by hiking, biking or canoeing. She believes in maintaining a healthy body, mind and soul. It would not be uncommon to find Tilia exploring local churches and places of worship. Her faith is an integral part of her being and she finds much peace in practising her Catholic beliefs. Catholic education is at the heart of her actions. Advocating for Catholic leaders has been Tilia's passion for over three decades.

For those who have not yet met Tilia, know she is very approachable. Tilia has a genuine interest in getting to know others, as well as helping those in need of assistance, and she is resoundingly dedicated to advancing CPCO and our Associates. [CP](#)

Antonella Rubino
Support Services Advisor, CPCO

Mentorship for Racialized Leaders

By Philip Gahunia

A joint study published in March 2024 by St. Michael's Hospital and the University of Toronto presented reasons why few Black medical students pursue a career in surgery. Underrepresentation means inequitable access to surgical training which inhibits the diverse workforce, essential for good patient care. Addressing this issue effectively requires incorporating equity and anti-racism principles which includes prioritizing mentorship practices.

One Black medical student noted, "Not really having Black mentors at all because there are very few Black physicians and even fewer specifically in surgery ... if you're looking for that question of 'what is it like to be a Black surgeon?'... there's not many people who can answer that question."¹

Dr. Jory Simpson, who identifies as white and is the senior author of the study, stated, "Mentorship is extremely important early on in one's medical career. I had family friends that were surgeons and they kind of took me under their wing on day one of medical school ... talked to me and mentored me and invited me to opportunities that other people may have not gotten."²

Across several fields and disciplines mentorship is an evidence-based approach for personal and professional development. Widely regarded as a best practice for uplifting racialized communities, mentoring opens the doors to opportunities for those within groups that have historically experienced structural and systemic barriers to employment. This perspective informs Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017), which names the establishment and strengthening of fellowship and mentorship programs as action items to encourage and enhance diversity in the hiring and promotion of school and system leaders.³ Mentorship for racialized principals, which is invitational and collaborative, provides the support vital to meeting the evolving

challenges of creating confident and capable school administrators.

The numbers justify the need for equitable hiring. According to the People for Education's Ontario School Survey (2021-22), 87 per cent of school principals self-identified as "white."⁴ This is synonymous with the Catholic Principals Council of Ontario Membership Census (2022) in which 88 per cent of census respondents identified themselves as "white (including European ancestry)." This disproportionate percentage raises issues related to inclusion, accessibility and the lack of diverse representation in leadership positions.

Almost 25 years ago, *Coloring Outside the Lines*, Gardiner et al. (2000), pushed for changing the image of educational administration in the United States. They challenged the dominant culture of school leadership described as having an androcentric view, which they defined as being informed by "white male norms." The authors sought transformational change through mentorship to create greater access and successful outcomes for the largest equity-deserving group in publicly funded education – women.

A quarter of a century since the book's publication, we may take for granted that significant social and economic achievements have been made by women through the ongoing advocacy work for gender equality. Today, this improvement is observed in school leadership roles here in Ontario. In the People for Education's Ontario School Survey (2021-22), 60 per cent of principals self-identified as women, while 40 per cent as men. These promising numbers reflect changes towards a more equitable gender balance in leadership roles achieved by improvements in both professional development and recruitment practices; however, the statistics relating to racial disparities remain unfulfilled.

Witnessing first-hand a racialized principal enact culturally responsive practices has also influenced Sherif to move forward in his discernment. He explains, “Research says when (students) have representation in the curriculum and in their teachers, they are more responsive – this is having an effect. If this is the case with students, teachers and curricula it must be the same case when it comes to administrators.”

Sherif and Scotula exemplify the invitational and collaborative processes needed in a successful mentoring relationship. When Scotula invited Sherif to create an infographic on the importance of mentors for racialized educators for RAMP, he was able to summarize his vision in five categories inspired by her leadership style: Cultural Sensitivity, Personalized Support, Open & Honest Communication, Modelling Success and Networking & Community Building (see Figure 1).

The benefits of mentors who actively listen, reassure and guide cannot be overstated. As barrier-free recruitment strategies create greater opportunities for new principals, mentoring relationships support greater retention

rates and improve administrators’ collective capacity towards developing and achieving an educational vision. Mentoring initiatives specifically focused on supporting underrepresented groups creates an affirming environment for the next generation of school leaders to feel connected and supported to engage in the transformative leadership schools really need. [CP](#)

Philip Gahunia

Principal, St. Dominic Savio Catholic School, TCDSB

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⁴ 2021–2022 Annual Ontario School Survey Data Handbook. People for Education, <https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/2021-2022-annual-ontario-school-survey/>. Accessed 22 April 2024.

⁵ Gardiner, Mary E., et al. *Coloring Outside the Lines: Mentoring Women into School Leadership*. State University of New York Press, 2000.



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Why Don't We Care More About the Humans Who Work in Schools?

By Annie Kidder

Principals in Ontario schools are dealing with increasingly unmanageable levels of stress, and it's not readily apparent that the public, politicians or policymakers care.

In their responses to People for Education's 2023-24 Annual Ontario School Survey,¹ 61 per cent of Ontario principals disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "My recent levels of stress at work feel manageable." A further 58 per cent disagreed that their school had the resources necessary to support the mental health and well-being of school staff. These results have been worsening every year since the beginning of the pandemic.

The Ontario numbers correspond with findings from across Canada and internationally. For example, a report from 2022, based on a survey conducted by the Rand Corporation², found 85 per cent of principals in the United States were experiencing job-related stress, compared to 35 per cent of working adults in other professions. There are equally worrying reports from Ireland³, Australia⁴ and Poland⁵ all pointing to high levels of burnout and stress among school principals.

The perfect storm of stress

A number of factors have combined to create a perfect storm in our schools: fallout from the pandemic, staff shortages, increasing mental health needs among students and staff, and the demands created by a barrage of new policies that must be implemented by principals.

The impact of the pandemic continues to be felt in schools, where students are not only experiencing learning loss, but also increased behavioural and mental health issues⁶, and only a quarter of Ontario principals agree their school has the resources necessary to support the mental health and well-being of its students.

Principals also describe being faced with a continual stream of new policies they are expected to implement

without consultation, within short timelines and with insufficient professional development for staff.

All these factors have left principals feeling overlooked, overworked and undervalued.

Where is the public outcry and policy support?

During the pandemic, there was a sudden universal recognition of the importance of schools and the humans in them.

Schools were in the headlines every day, and school closures reminded everyone in-person human relationships and interactions form an essential component of all learning. This sudden public recognition is backed up by years of research⁷ showing the deepest learning happens through communication, collaboration, continual feedback and support.

Real learning depends on people, and it depends on people who are supported to do their essential jobs.

But with the pandemic over, it's as if as suddenly as we recognized the importance of schools, we have equally suddenly developed collective amnesia. We've forgotten the essential role our publicly funded schools can play, and we've forgotten why the humans in those schools are so important.

In Ontario, the province continues to announce – and expect school staff to implement – new policies for things like financial literacy, apprenticeships, de-streaming Grade 9, new math curriculum, technology courses, hands-on skills classes, etc. But there has been little acknowledgement and no new policy to ensure school staff have all the support they need to do their vital jobs.

There have been numerous reports from across the country and around the world that point to a human crisis in our schools. But somehow none of the reports and none of the evidence has created a public push for change.

“Let Us Listen to One Another”

Pope Francis



By Mary Beth Tersigni McCuen and Yvonne Runstedler

As a first-time PQP instructor, infusing a deep understanding of equity was central to our candidate's learning. Yvonne Runstedler (PhD) and James Dixon (trans activist) present often under the title, "Our Call to Love: 2SLGBTQIA+ Students in Catholic Schools." I knew their message would be incredibly important for our PQP candidates. This article is an overview of our conversations about the important role of Catholic principals in leading equity for all our students.

Mary Beth Tersigni McCuen's (she/her) Reflections

Few subjects are more divisive for a Catholic principal than the dialogue about the ways we support 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Schools include children of many ethnicities, experiences and religions, and the task of creating an atmosphere of belonging is increasingly complex. Catholicism has an extensive "code of conduct," may seem at odds with the values in current culture. Yet, gender and sexuality have become the flash points of deep division.

In my own school, there are families with only one parent, only a grandparent, two moms, two dads and many other combinations of love surrounding children. There are families who have recently immigrated from countries where 2SLGBTQIA+ people are persecuted, where homosexuality is a crime. I have community members who advocate for much more open acceptance of 2SLGBTQIA+ students, more than just raising a flag in June. And families who refuse to walk past that same flag as it flies during Pride Month. The challenge of creating a space where all these students and families can feel welcome and respected is very real.

In my school community, we work to create a space where everyone's story can be heard, and where we try understanding our differences, and accept each other's humanity. In educational contexts, we teach students to engage in debate and mediate conflict with

dignity. Principals are faced with upholding the protected grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code. The tension in this responsibility is often at odds with some of the opinions of school stakeholders, including parish priests, about how outward facing our welcome should be.

Although I believe the current efforts of Pope Francis through the Synod to be hopeful and optimistic, we cannot ignore that 2SLGBTQIA+ youth have often felt unwelcome in Catholic spaces. Catholics who love someone who identifies as 2SLGBTQIA+ also feel this exclusion. In the words of a former student, they learned to be gay meant you could not be a "Catholic." It breaks my heart that a young person was made to feel who they are is at odds with their faith. My own faith has served me well throughout my life. I want all our students to have this kind of faith, one they can turn to in times of joy and darkness, a faith that sustains them, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity. 2SLGBTQIA+ Catholic students deserve to be celebrated and nurtured in faith, not in spite of who they are, but because of it.

Yvonne Runstedler's (she/her) Reflections

As a former program coordinator and consultant, now a researcher studying the inclusion of gender-diverse students in Catholic schools and working to support Catholic teachers in my role on staff at OECTA provincial, my classroom is now wherever I am invited to speak to share my professional and academic experience. Like Mary Beth, when I was a secondary

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Emotional Literacy in Leadership

By Cameron Hauseman and Dillon Ragbirsingh

Success as a principal or vice-principal demands emotional literacy. In an era where emotional labour, burnout and stress have become synonymous with K-12 education, school leaders must be able to effectively manage their own emotions and possess the skills to support dysregulated students, teachers and members of the school community.

Emotional literacy involves individuals recognizing, controlling and understanding their own emotional states and accurately perceiving the emotions experienced by others so they can express themselves in appropriate ways. Despite rarely being included in a principal's or vice-principal's job description, managing one's own emotions and those of others has always been a key component of effective school leadership. Crises and tragedies in the school community, or being on the receiving end of angry, unprofessional and otherwise unpleasant behaviours

from both students and adults are but a few examples of the situations school leaders are expected to manage.

Emotional literacy is an increasingly important element of contemporary principals and vice-principals' work. Systemic issues that are outside of an individual school leader's control, including working within a disorienting policy context, increased occupational health and safety responsibilities, intensified and demanding workloads, and resistance encountered when supporting students all require the principal/vice-principal to be in possession of a high degree of emotional literacy.

While many factors and forces that increase the emotional aspects of their work are beyond a school leader's sphere of influence they can control how they respond to the challenging situations that characterize their workday. It can be useful to think about the strategies used to

Empathy as a Bridge

By Mary Gordon

Leadership in education has become increasingly complex and political. Principals now swim in a sea of controversy whether they like it, or not. For instance, 10 years ago, it would have been unimaginable that principals, school districts and ministers of education would need to take a position on Artificial Intelligence.

Speaking last year at the Collision technology conference about the use of AI in education, something became obvious to me. It was the lack of understanding or valuing of the role of real live teachers and of the human connection between teachers and children. Principals and teachers do not just teach subjects, through relational teaching, they teach people. By incorporating empathy into their teaching, educators on every level have a huge influence on children. They provide a role model. Empathy cannot be ‘taught’ as we might teach math but can be ‘caught’ through live interactions with empathic educators with whom children experience a supportive relationship.

Empathy is an essential skill for leaders. Forbes magazine considers empathy the most important leadership skill¹. Empathy is no longer considered a soft trait but a powerful tool in negotiations and in hard-core business.

Empathic leadership is more than a popularity contest. It is strategic, it is relational and it is powerful. It is not used to manipulate, but it is used for increased understanding and connection. Empathy is the connection to the emotional realm of another person and is inclusive of a wide range of emotions. Empathy is probably the single most powerful force to support relationships between principals and staff.

When teachers feel understood, accepted and supported, it is usually because they had an empathic principal. Principals have complex jobs, and they will find if they use empathic listening – listening without judgment, listening with no assumptions and listening to understand the perspective of the other person – people will feel heard and will be less guarded and more open to constructive discussions about change.

Incorporating empathy into all the roles educational leaders play can make a tremendous difference in one’s effectiveness as a leader. Empathy is the bridge that connects everyone whether they are teachers who report to you, colleagues with whom you work, children in your schools or the school community. Empathy can be disarming when dealing with conflict.

True empathy incorporates both cognitive empathy, seeing the perspective of others, and affective empathy, feeling the emotions of others. In Roots of Empathy, we define empathy as the ability “to feel with the other.” Our definition goes beyond cognitive empathy or perspective taking. Educators at every level have always done a good job of helping students take the perspective of the other. The trouble with cognitive empathy on its own is that it can be used to help or to harm. Sociopaths may have high levels of perspective taking, but typically very low levels of affective empathy.

Roots of Empathy (ROE) is an elementary school-based program founded in Toronto in 1996, which has spread to 11 countries. At the heart of the ROE program is a baby who becomes a “tiny teacher.” A neighbourhood infant and parent visit the school classroom nine times over the school year. A trained ROE instructor coaches students to observe the baby’s development and to label the baby’s feelings and intentions. In this experiential learning model, the baby is the “teacher” and a lever the instructor uses to help children to identify and reflect on their feelings and the feelings of others.

The emotional literacy taught in the program lays the foundation for safer and more caring classrooms where children are the “changers.” They become more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy), and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically or emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other emotional cruelties. ROE thereby addresses both cognitive and affective empathy – it educates both the mind and the heart.

Principal Action Research and Prosocial Adult Learning

By Karen Shannon

Advancing professional learning in schools for principals and staff that addresses key priorities for student well-being and achievement requires attention to prosocial design. Adult learners, like students, need to experience learning conditions that foster and reinforce caring conditions, as well as clear expectations and accountability.

The volume and complexity of daily demands on school principals from their managerial and instructional priorities exhausts and threatens to overwhelm many school leaders. These can negatively impact job satisfaction and increase work-related stress, potentially leading to burnout (Mahfouz, Greenberg & Rodriquez, 2019). In their school leadership role, principals are well positioned to advise school districts on how to create prosocial conditions needed by adult learners to achieve successful school and district improvement plan outcomes.

Our Learning Journey

The Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board embarked on a unique learning journey to advance the Reaching Every Reader Strategy in schools, focusing on principal engagement in leading and monitoring school-based, gap-closing interventions in structured literacy. Working in collaboration with an external researcher, superintendents sought to answer the question, “How can we best leverage the principal as instructional leader?”

Principals participating in the gap-closing intervention project would be invited to reflect on their experience and provide recommendations to guide the design of future professional learning implementations to foster high levels of engagement of principals and school teams.

Ten schools were selected to participate in the intervention project from January to June, 2023. The project provided schools with the support of a special assignment teacher (SAT) in Literacy, coaching from a system principal mentor (SPM), and release time for each

school team to meet and work together throughout the project. Each school used diagnostic and achievement data to identify students who would benefit most from targeted structured literacy interventions and which staff members would be involved.

School principals and vice-principals agreed to document their learning and engagement using a five-phase Action Research Cycle – Envision, Plan, Take Action, Analyze and Reflect – focusing on their participation as instructional leaders (Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers, 2000). The effectiveness of intervention strategies, literacy skill development of students and teacher/early childhood educator learning were closely monitored and documented by school teams, the principal, the SAT and the SPM. Each Action Research Plan reflected the unique context, student needs and resources of the school community. All principals met virtually three times over the duration of the project with the SPM and external researcher to share insights, ask questions and encourage each other.

Significant Success

The gap-closing structured literacy project yielded significant success for student literacy skill development, teacher instructional efficacy, principal engagement and the development of recommendations for the design of future school-based professional learning. The comments of principals and vice-principals highlight the importance of professional learning design, which integrates and fosters social-emotional competencies including: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills (CASEL, 2018). The impact of having time to reflect and an expectation that reflections be documented and shared at the discretion of the principal proved to be extremely powerful. One principal commented, “*In the beginning I felt a lack of time for analyzing and reflecting but it became a good pressure – required me to keep data from my time in classrooms.*”

Becoming the Educational Leader of Tomorrow

By Debbie Frendo

Emotional intelligence (EQ), a growth mindset, creativity and resilience are all crucial skills for educational leaders in our rapidly evolving world. These skills enable leaders to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, foster inclusive and supportive learning environments, and adapt to constant change. They are essential tools for effective communication, conflict resolution and the creation of a positive school culture.

The 5-Lands Model supports leaders and staff in their personal and professional journey to be ready for our changing world (Reuven Lelong, 2021). The model is based on theories of the plasticity of the brain, the future of the workplace and leadership in the age of VUCA – Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. It is also based on interviews with CEOs, Human Resource leaders and professors from various universities and faculties.

Components of the 5-Lands Framework:

1. **The Mindset Land (Dweck, 2007):** based on the work of Carol Dweck and her research on growth versus fixed mindset, as well as on research in brain plasticity. A growth mindset, the belief that everyone can learn and develop new skills, is essential for success.
2. **The Artgineer Land (Pink, 2006):** includes abilities of the artist and the engineer. This land focuses on the whole brain approach, a metaphor to describe different ways of thinking.
3. **The EQ Land (Goleman, 1995):** is based on emotional intelligence, our ability to understand, use and manage our emotions and to understand the feelings of others. Strong EQ allows us to make sound decisions.
4. **The Sustainability Land (Barsh, Cranston and Lewis, 2009):** is based on the analogy that we need skills to “stay on the boat when the waters get rough.” Are we equipped?
5. **I-21 Land:** represents you(I) in the 21st century and encourages participants to reflect on the upskilling necessary for success.

The Ottawa Catholic School Board: The 5-Lands Pilot

The OCSB uses a Deep Learning approach in education, which focuses on six global competencies: citizenship, character, communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. The 5-Lands framework supports educational leaders to develop and strengthen their ability to give students a true deep learning experience.

In 2020, Dr. Michael Fullan, Director of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL), contacted Tom D'Amico, Director of Education at Ottawa Catholic, about participating in a 5-Lands pilot.

Tom D'Amico recognized the possibilities, "After an initial introduction to the 5-Lands instrument, I saw connections to the work on Deep Learning that we were invested in with Dr. Fullan. I saw the possibility of providing support to our leaders through 5-Lands, as they developed new competencies to deal with the changing workplace during the pandemic. After trying the instrument myself, I found it provided insights that went beyond what I had experienced with previous leadership inventory tools."

Eighteen members of the OCSB, including senior administration, department leaders, school principals and consultants, participated in a 5-Lands pilot. They

Scrub! And Get Real!

By Megan McGarry and Laurie McCann

Scrub it clean! Wait? What? I'm sure you're wondering what I mean by "Scrub It Clean!" it's for those who have any type of social media presence, both young and old. We recommend you do a social media scrub every once and a while.

What does a social media scrub look like? It's when you go through either your followers or friends list and decide who you should keep and who you should remove. My analogy is this: Let's say you run into "Sally" at the grocery store, do you duck down Aisle 4 to avoid her? Or do you go up and say "hi?" If you're ducking down the aisle, then maybe remove her from your social media. If you aren't willing to talk to that person in person, why are you allowing them into your life on your social media accounts?

Sometimes we allow people into our accounts, who at one point were a part of our lives. But things shift and change. Not everyone needs to see what you are doing. And, while doing a scrub, really think about what you've posted. Maybe some of those posts don't really represent who you are. No harm in deleting them from your accounts.

Sometimes we overshare. Youth are famous for doing just this. They post their every emotion, feeling and so much more. The problem with that is, kids can be cruel and those posts could be used against the poster. As adults, it is imperative we have those courageous conversations with our youth about not having to post every moment that happens in their life.

This leads into FOMO. That's Fear of Missing Out. In some ways, we all suffer somewhat from this. How many of us adults pick up our phone before we go to bed and check out feeds one more time? A lot of us do! Now, take that and amplify it by a hundred and that's our youth. They have a really hard time putting that device down.

Here's a strategy to use with youth – whether your own kids or the students in your school – to help combat FOMO. Have them put their phone down and away from them, where they can't reach it for 15 minutes, maybe while having dinner or doing homework. Each week increase that time by 10 to 15 minutes. Every little bit helps. And the more they can separate themselves from their phone, the easier it will become. As they progress,



Launching Leadership in Your School

By Gregory J. Tabone

Did you know a rocket cannot fly full speed to orbit? Although one would think it simply takes off and steadily accelerates until it achieves orbit, this is not true. A rocket does accelerate from the launch, however, there is a point spaceward where the increasing pressure on the rocket can destroy it. This extreme stress point is called Max Q. Scientists must know exactly where this point occurs to avoid the rocket being destroyed by dynamic pressure. To escape a catastrophe, the rocket must throttle back on its speed just a little to get through Max Q. It can then increase speed until it reaches space (The Space Techie, 2021).

Keeping in mind the process of launching a rocket and Max Q, there are concepts we can apply to schools creating environments that promote socio-emotional learning and support people as they grow professionally. Two of these concepts are: 1) Planning the trajectory, and 2) Pausing at points during the plan's implementation when staff need support.

Powerful results can occur if we apply these concepts to the adults in our school. And one of the best ways to help people grow professionally is mutually creating effective and innovative school improvement plans (see *Launching Into Education's New Future*). A well-developed plan includes everyone at the school and addresses their needs and concerns. It also provides many opportunities for leadership and growth.

If a rocket cannot fly as fast as it can to its destination without repercussions, why create school improvement plans that are rushed and not carefully planned to ensure their success? Rushing and poor planning are why many

improvement plans fail and why schools often give up on them. But how do we challenge schools to apply pressure for improvement on all those in the building, so it's not solely led by the principal?

If we combine the Max Q concept with Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), some interesting comparisons may be seen. Vygotsky's theory states the most effective learning area is, "the space between what a learner can do without assistance, and what a learner can do with ... guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Doolittle, 1997). Considering what happens to a rocket between launch and attaining orbit and comparing it with parts of Vygotsky's theory, both concepts can help schools make effective, innovative school learning environments for both students and staff. And if planned properly, many leadership opportunities will occur.

Vygotsky states, "a child can engage in more advanced cognitive activities than the child can undertake alone. A more experienced partner helps the learner in various ways: by breaking the activity into component parts to make it more understandable and accessible, modelling new strategies for solving the problem, encouraging and supporting the learner's involvement in the more complex components, and doing the more difficult task components so that the learner can concentrate on other aspects" (Matusov, 2001). For adults, this means working in groups, getting specialists in to help support educational growth, establishing clear and achievable incremental goals, and assigning different leadership roles to different parts of the plan to bring school staff together

Student-Centred H.A.T. Program Develops Mind, Body and Soul

By Josephine Virgilio

A favourite movie advocating the importance of fitness and nutrition is Creed, now streaming on Netflix. Creed is about Adonis Johnson (Michael B. Jordan), son of boxing champion Apollo Creed, who died before Adonis was born. With boxing in his blood, Adonis asks retired champ Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone) to be his trainer. Through perseverance and training, Adonis succeeds in obtaining the heavy weight boxing title.

The moral of the story: believe in yourself and don't let anyone tell you that you cannot achieve the impossible through hard work and patience.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community rooted in the love of Christ. We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge and to lead lives of faith, hope and charity. Educators transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action. Our actions and behaviour define who we are as a person. We lead our lives through the voice of Jesus who advocates for inclusivity for all.

Catholic teachers educate the whole child. As Catholic educators, we try to instill a sense of morality discipleship and a sense of community. God has purpose. God doesn't give us something we cannot handle. Through the eyes of God, we try to be a better person.

As Catholic educators, we are committed to developing the 3Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic), as well as the 4Cs (character, communication, compassion, critical-thinking skills). Extracurricular

activities and sport programs provide a venue to cultivate virtue, build character and promote civility in our students. It becomes a whole school effort to create a community with positive personal attributes and behaviours such as respect, honesty, kindness, hard work and self-discipline.

We know that children learn by doing. The learning process is reflecting on learning (Fullan, 2006). Educators transform the lives of students every day subliminally. Learning standards are currently being redefined for children and students. This is evident in the implementation of Financial Literacy and Coding into the Mathematics curriculum, as well as the introduction of teacher testing to beginning teachers in Mathematics and the need to provide greater technological innovations in classrooms vis-à-vis the internet in an effort to compete with increased globalization of education in the workforce.

One of TCDSB's multi-year strategic goals is to foster student achievement and well-being by supporting our students in meeting the Ontario

Catholic Graduate Expectations. These expectations are foundational to our work and are embedded in Catholic character formation. H.A.T. (Health, Action, Technology) is an example of a program that builds character and inclusivity in our school board.

Student-Centred H.A.T.

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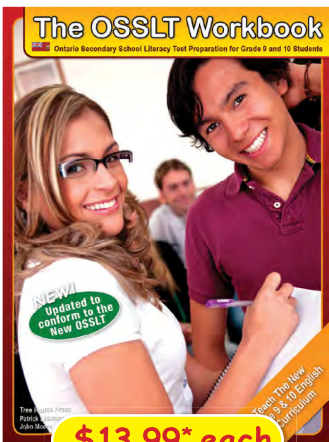
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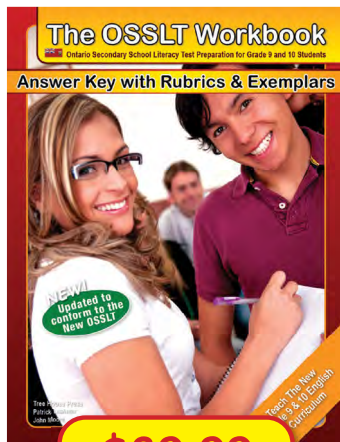
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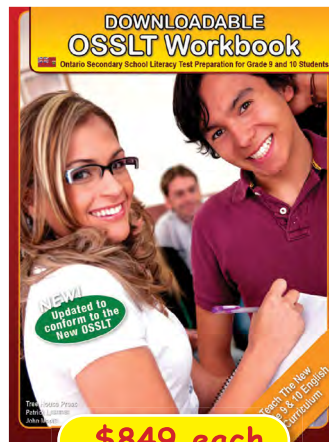
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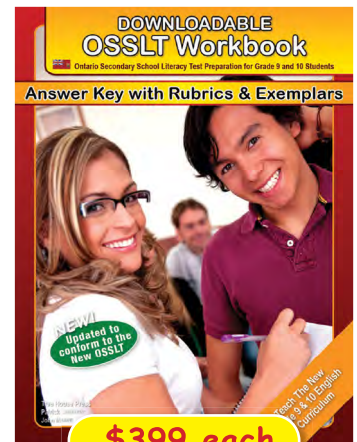
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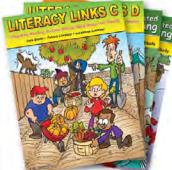




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