



PrincipalConnections

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STUDENT VOICE

DR. JEAN M. CLINTON
*How Can We Harness the
Power of Student Voice?*

**DR. ANDREW B. CAMPBELL
& KASCHKA WATSON**
Fostering Belonging

DR. CAROL CAMPBELL
*Student Voice During the
Pandemic and Beyond*

IN THIS ISSUE



How Can We Harness the Power of Student Voice? **6**



Fostering Belonging **10**



Student Voice During the Pandemic and Beyond **12**



Bringing Deep Caring to Student Voice **16**

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

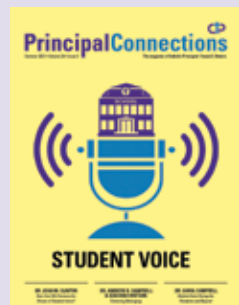
- How Can We Harness the Power of Student Voice? | **6**
- Fostering Belonging | **10**
- Student Voice During the Pandemic and Beyond | **12**
- Bringing Deep Caring to Student Voice | **16**
- What About the Adults in the Building? | **18**
- Are You Listening, Truly Listening? | **20**
- Silence is Not an Option | **22**
- Student Voice | **24**
- The Black Graduation Coach Project | **26**
- Humour Unlocks Student Voices | **29**
- AGM Address to Delegates | **55**
- CPCO Award Recipients | **56**

KEEPING YOU INFORMED

- Math – It's Time to Tap In | **32**
- When Communication Really Matters | **34**
- Student-Centred Market Develops Real-World Skills | **37**
- Elevating Student Voice in Special Education | **40**
- Sharing Their Why at School and Beyond | **42**
- Podcasts for Our On-Demand Generation of Media Consumers | **44**
- Empowering for Change | **46**
- Student Engagement in a COVID World | **48**
- Opportunity, Representation and Support | **50**
- I'm the Boss! A Little Child Shall Lead Us | **52**
- Members' Voices Are So Important | **54**

IN EVERY ISSUE

- From the President & the Executive Director: *As We Listen* | **4**
- From the Editor: *Whose Voices Aren't We Hearing?* | **5**



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Principal Connections is the proud recipient of the following awards:



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FROM THE PRESIDENT & THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Blaine MacDougall & Joseph Geiser

As We Listen

It has been an incredible year for each and every one of you and we are hoping that the upcoming summer will be very different than the last one. As we look back, it is safe to say that we have learned so very much. It might be important to pause and reflect on some of the best practices that we have experienced during this time. In speaking to many of you, we know that there are some very good routines that have been put in place that you will take into the new school year, which is fantastic!

You are all to be commended for your tireless leadership, and your ongoing care and compassion for your students, staff, parents and your own families. We know that the year was long and tiring for everyone, yet you were committed to your role as a Catholic leader throughout this entire time. We heard your voices throughout the year as you shared the many challenges that you were experiencing.

On your behalf, we continued to communicate these stories with the ministry, our partners in Catholic education and the media whenever we had the opportunity.

It has been an honour to have represented you as CPCO President during this unprecedented year. Having taken the opportunity to reach out to many of you, I truly enjoyed the time that you took out of your busy day to speak with me about your lived experiences. This provided me with wonderful examples of the effort, passion, determination and care that each of you as Catholic educators demonstrate daily.

It is your voice that is important for continued collaboration and success in building our future as Catholic school leaders.

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to work alongside the amazing staff at the CPCO office, our dedicated team on your Executive Council, our Associates, passionate AMRs, provincial Catholic partners and our colleagues at the Ministry of Education.

I especially thank the members of the CPCO Executive Council for the exceptional wisdom, good counsel

and excellent ability to serve, advocate and lead on behalf of every Catholic administrator in Ontario. Their dedication and willingness to serve on your behalf has been outstanding during this particularly challenging year. I extend my gratitude to our Executive Director, Joe Geiser and the entire CPCO staff for their support, guidance and good care of all endeavours related to the success of CPCO. This has been a learning year for everyone and without exception, this team has been invaluable to me. I extend a warm welcome

and best wishes to Antonella Rubino who will act on your behalf as CPCO President for 2021-2022. I wish her well as she continues to serve, advocate and lead on your behalf.

It is my hope that I leave you in a position of greater connectivity to our provincial organization. It is your voice that is important for continued collaboration and success in building our future as Catholic school leaders. God bless you and your ongoing service to our Catholic school communities.

Rest and enjoy the summer ahead!
Yours in Faith and Hope!



Whose Voices Aren't We Hearing?

Educators in Ontario have provided many opportunities for students to use their voice in our schools, be it through formal and informal structures, instructional pedagogy, cultural discussions, or reflective and evaluative measures. But despite our efforts, there are many students whose voices we still do not hear.

It is of crucial importance that we reach out to these unheard voices and find out why we are not hearing from them and what's holding them back? The underheard and underserved need our attention as we supposedly bring equity to our student voice initiative in Ontario.

Encouraging the growth of student voice begins with our own self-awareness. Relationships count. Understanding our own implicit biases, recognizing the types of student voice opportunities we create and extend to students, being mindful of the approach we use to foster safe and caring environments in our schools and being aware of how we go about involving students, so they see themselves in their own learning, are all part of the next steps. Purposeful action is called for! We need to own being intentional about this challenge.

Dr. Jean Clinton lays the foundation for this issue by shining light on the many aspects of student voice. Her article, ***How Can We Harness the Power of Student Voice?***, analyzes the value of student voice in learning, discusses the links between student voice and student agency, and focuses on the deep connection between student voice and self worth. Dr. Clinton underscores the importance of teachers gaining access to student perspective. She challenges us to ask students for feedback on their learning.

Student Voice During the Pandemic and Beyond by Dr. Carol Campbell shares current research on student learning during "Generation Covid." She highlights inequities and the well-being and physical concerns that have surfaced through this extraordinary period of time. Dr. Campbell believes student voice is a tool that will

move us forward to avoid a generational catastrophe and will help us build a new generation of student leaders.

In ***Fostering Belonging***, Dr. Andrew Campbell and Kashchka Watson share ways to elevate student voice in our schools. They call for deliberate actions to eliminate students' feelings of reluctance and isolation by promoting a sense of belonging through genuine educator interest and care. Focusing on student motivation and helping students to self actualize their learning by seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum we teach, are key.

International author Barbara Colorosso emphasizes the importance of creating safe harbours in our schools. She advocates that educators must become comfortable with finding ways to encourage students to use their voices to exchange ideas, speak up, take a stand and take action. Promoting kind and caring acts within a school is part of the solution she believes will grow accountability for the overall growth and well-being of the school community.

Stephen Hurley, host of voicED Radio, advocates that if we want to change education, we need to change the way we talk about education. A sense of voice among young people is vital for a sense of personal well-being, social confidence and the future of our democracy. He highlights the importance of a sense of voice among staff. People need authentic invitation to speak up and speak out. Every voice matters. Invitation is important. Modelling is critical.

The last decade has provided us with amazing examples of the power of student voice. Greta Thunberg, Sophia Mathur, Malala Yousafzai and Amanda Gorman serve as incredible role models who have helped significantly in bringing awareness and perspective to the world. Their voices did not grow by accident. Their voices were invited, welcomed, developed, supported and grown through relationships with caring educators and their own positive support systems. Every student has a voice. Ask yourself, right now, who are you hearing?

How Can We Harness the Power of Student Voice?

By Dr. Jean M. Clinton





FOSTERING BELONGING

By Dr. Andrew B. Campbell and Kaschka Watson

A reality that is apparent to most educational leaders is that students' contributions are key to their overall learning and educational experiences. Unfortunately, many of our students are made to feel as though they are an annoyance all day long by their teachers.

Pandolpho, 2020

This should not be the experience of any of the students under the care of educational leaders in our schools. The road towards achieving racial equity for all our students is visible before us. Educational leaders have to see the need for change and act intentionally to ensure that all students are given fair opportunities toward achieving educational success. They should make it their duty to learn, unlearn and relearn about the experiences of their students so that they can incorporate equitable strategies and implement actions that foster student belonging and elevate their voices.

Elevating Voices

Who determines who belongs? What does belonging look like? Students understand at an early age when someone or something doesn't belong. Yet, many educational leaders keep pretending as if students don't see the messages, cues, symbols and language that point to how they are being treated. The reality is that students see them and they will tell you which teacher loved and cared for them. This is why educational leaders must create a school culture and climate where students feel that sense of belonging. Fostering belonging in schools is critical to students' motivation and educational engagement. For example, Maslow's hierarchy of human needs outlines the importance of creating a sense of belonging for students where their learning needs are met and a sense of safety is insured. When intentionally fostered and sustained, this

Student Voice During the Pandemic and Beyond

By Dr. Carol Campbell



Bringing Deep Caring to STUDENT VOICE

By Barbara Colorosso

Far too many of our students are not all right. Some go to school every day filled with fear and trepidation, their voices silenced, lest they become too visible to those who would target them for being different in some way. It is important that our schools are a safe place for all students to use their voice to speak out against the microaggressions and the gross injustices they experience or witness, to come up with plans to make their school and their community safer and more welcoming, and to openly show care and concern for one another in the now.

One of Russia's greatest novelists and one of its most influential moral philosophers and social reformists, Leo Tolstoy, writes about a matter of caring deeply in *Three Questions, A Short Story*. A king asked his subjects the answers to three questions: 1) What was the right time for every action; 2) Who were the most necessary people; and 3) How might he know what was the most important thing to do?" Not satisfied with the answers he received, the king disguised himself as a peasant and sought answers from a hermit. Seeing the hermit struggling with turning the soil in his garden, the king offered to help. Hours later an injured man came out of the forest. The hermit and king bound his wounds and gave him water. The wounded man revealed he had come to seek revenge and kill the king but had been stabbed by the king's guards. Grateful for the king's kindness, the stranger asked forgiveness. After this encounter of reconciliation, the king approached the hermit and again asked for answers to his three questions. The hermit explained the king already knew the answers, "... there is only one time that is important. Now! It is the most important time because it is the only time where we have any power. The most necessary man is he with whom you are, for no man knows if he will ever have dealings with anyone else; and the most important affair is to do him good, because for that purpose alone was man sent into this life."



A 17-year-old regularly visits his elderly neighbour, running errands, shovelling his sidewalks, and listening to his stories, "because Mr. Smithe lives alone and needs help."

A student shares his lunch with a classmate, "because she is hungry."

A Grade 12 student helps a classmate understand a physic assignment, "because he needed help."

A popular student tells several girls that if they want to be in the popular crowd, "Don't eat lunch with the new girl." One girl goes over and sits next to the new girl.

A student tells his peers to confront another student because he is "different from us." A classmate steps between them, "that's mean, that's cruel, leave him alone."



Are You Listening, Truly Listening?

By Judith Desjardins

Maya Angelou's wise words, "Do the best you can until you know better. When you know better, do better." have been a cornerstone in my leadership journey over the past 20 years.

I, like most system and school leaders, am in a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique. As principals and vice-principals, we make leadership decisions to serve our students, staff and community that are influenced by a variety of voices and must simultaneously make choices to prioritize or amplify some voices over others. The impact of our current realities of a pandemic and highlighted social injustices have refocused my attention

to hearing student voice with earnest. Students need us to hear them and to champion their voice, especially in supporting their mental health within our schools.

I am currently on secondment with School Mental Health Ontario. SMH-ON works together with Ontario school districts to support student mental health. We provide leadership, resources, implementation coaching and a community of practice. SMH-ON supports students and educators to care for their mental health; maintain a strong sense of identity, belonging, confidence and hope even in challenging circumstances; and supports individuals to seek help when problems arise. SMH-ON is committed to the importance of student engagement to

STUDENT VOICE

By Derek Chen and Lavinia Latham



As Catholic educators and leaders, we are called by Christ to create an inclusive, safe and welcoming space for our students and staff. However, data show us that we are still struggling to do so with students that come from racialized and other marginalized communities. In response to our moral imperative to address equity concerns in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), a decision was made to take intentional action.

In 2018, the TCDSB released its first Three-Year Equity Action Plan (EAP). As part of the six-person team that put the plan together, we were proud of its all-encompassing nature, created to mirror the Ministry of Education's Ontario Education and Equity Action Plan (OEEAP).

However, in April 2020, when George Floyd was murdered and the world finally absorbed what the Black community had been saying for decades, it quickly became apparent that the TCDSB EAP was incomplete. A motion was put forward by a student trustee that the board act in a more targeted manner to address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. The Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy (DABR) became a main priority of the Equity department. The question was: where do we start?

The team believed the only way to create a DABR strategy was to consult with those who have been

primarily affected by anti-Black racism – all stakeholders who identify as Black within the TCDSB, and most importantly, students. We set out to follow a plan that would encompass nine steps.

1. Listen

We quickly determined that any strategy about any stakeholders, especially those in marginalized communities, would require input from those stakeholders. The motto “Nothing About Us Without Us” must hold true for any authenticity to a plan. This would require listening to students and others in the Black community, but also involving the voice of that community to the planning team. An invitation was offered to the board's African Canadian Advisory Committee to have a representative join the team.

Dr. Charis Newton-Thompson, a well-respected member of the Black community, and former principal in the Toronto District School Board, volunteered and became a vital member of the team that was composed of the following people: the Superintendent of Equity, Diversity, Indigenous Education and Community Relations; the TCDSB's Human Rights and Equity Advisor; members of the Research department; and a social worker.



The Black Graduation Coach Project

By Sharise Sealy-McCallum and JoJo Abrokwah

In 2019, the Ministry of Education launched a pilot project to address disproportionalities for Black students in education. The *Graduation Coaches for Black Students* role was developed in response to *Towards Race Equity in Education*. This report recognized the academic outcomes for Black students were significantly lower than their peers due to the prevalence of systemic racism within the Ontario education system.

The project honours and responds to the voices of Black students in a meaningful, timely and authentic manner. It aims to determine if providing intensive, culturally responsive support to Black students will impact their academic achievement and well-being. The pilot hopes to bring awareness to Anti-Black Racism in education and

dismantle structural barriers that impact achievement, while centring on the experiences, voice and the dignity of Black students.

What is a Black Graduation Coach?

The role of the graduation coach is complex. It includes mentorship and advising of Black students, by advocating and identifying each student's unique strengths and needs, and supporting them towards achieving the graduation expectations. Coaches are caring adults who offer culturally responsive interventions and individualized, holistic approaches to program delivery for Black students. Through these interventions, coaches highlight systemic barriers to Black student voice, engagement and excellence within school.



Illustration by James Island

HUMOUR

Unlocks Student Voices

By Sue Stephenson

As the saying goes, "A good laugh banishes a thousand worries." Many people's sense of humour has gone missing in the last year. Often the best prescription is to laugh a little more and worry a little less. That's easier said than done. We – even principals and vice-principals – need to become serious about the benefits of laughter.

As a teacher and a principal, I never could find the concepts of happiness and laughter in curriculum documents, so I created a curriculum for students to learn these important life skills. These abilities may have helped kids cope with this unprecedented year, if we'd had the clairvoyance to teach them beforehand. It flabbergasts me

that laughter and humour are rarely included in mental health experts' pandemic coping strategies. Let's not forget the value of therapeutic humour. It's one of the 24 character strengths identified in positive psychology.

Laughter releases a tsunami of healthy chemicals in our bodies. Dopamine makes us happier. Oxytocin builds trusting relationships. Laughter lowers cortisol, relieves stress and improves our immune system. Endorphins help us feel slightly euphoric. Joyologist and humour colleague Allen Klein says, "Laughter helps us cope with the unbearable so that we can stay on the bright side of things until the bright side actually comes along."

MATH

It's Time to Tap In

By Jennifer Vieira

Our understanding of student voice in the mathematics classroom has evolved into a sophisticated, engaging and intentional concept. Student voice empowers the co-construction of learning in a community where diverse thinking is valued, and students feel safe to engage as collaborative leaders.

Where have we been?

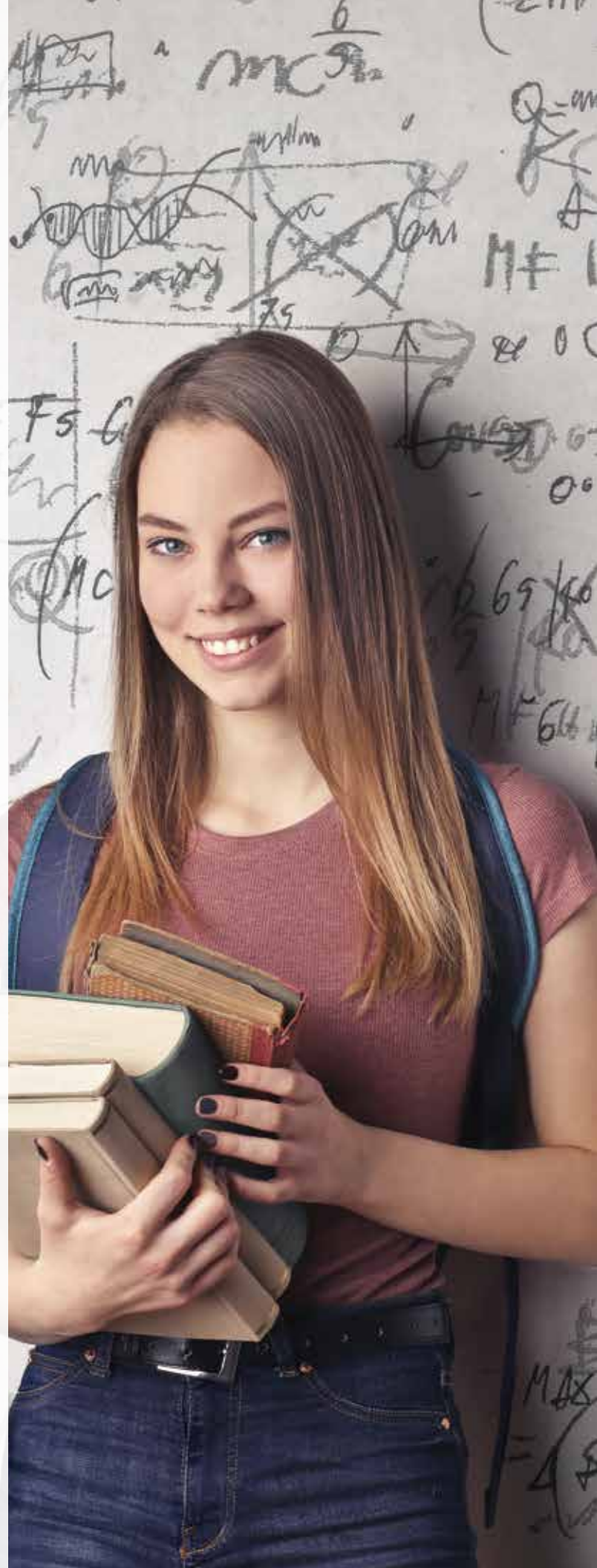
It was not too long ago that a standard math classroom looked like this:

- Teacher identifies what they believe students need to learn
- Teacher imparts knowledge through an upfront lesson to the whole class
- Teacher selects a set of questions for student practice (or the textbook did)
- Teacher determines ability through assessment of the practice questions
- Teacher feedback focused on correct or incorrect answers

We eventually figured out that math instruction like this is not effective for many students. There are many reasons why this is the case; but of particular importance is the glaring absence of a key element: the role of student voice.

For some time, we watched many students struggle in math; not the productive struggle that leads to an insightful and exhilarating 'aha' moment, but rather an uncomfortable and constant struggle that led many students to believe they cannot do math or that they are not a math person.

We knew math instruction needed to change, and we learned that elevating student voice in teaching and learning was powerful in so many ways.





When Communication Really Matters

By Joan Barry and Kimberly Hutchinson



A community is more than the sum total of persons that belong to it. It is the place where one learns to love.

Pope Francis

As leaders in Catholic education, we are called upon to nurture inclusive school communities that honour the dignity of all students. What does it mean to be in community with one another? It is vital to build meaningful connections so all our community members feel a sense of belonging and feel valued. Intentionally building these connections for preverbal students or students with limited verbal communication skills is essential. What beliefs, structures and practices do we need to nurture and sustain so all members of our community can communicate in a respectful, inclusive environment?



Student-Centred Market Develops Real-World Skills

By Josephine Virgilio

One of my favourite movies is *Freedom Writers*. Hilary Swank, takes the tenacious role of a teacher name Erin Gruwell, who makes a radical change in her curriculum in her efforts to inspire her low achieving students. She encourages her students to write about their own lives in journals. Their poignant personal essays were later published in *The Freedom Writers Diary*. The moral, appreciate the value of every person's effort to better the lives of others, irrespective of cost.

Catholic leadership begins with moving towards a synergistic goal(s) or influence a group people in the achievement of those goals. John Maxwell would argue that leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness (Maxwell, 1998:1).

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

Elevating Student Voice in Special Education

By Lynne Charette



“Inclusive education is one that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.”

Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy

A culture of inclusion is foundational to the creation of schools that work for all students. The philosophy of the school staff directly and significantly affects the systems of support that are available for students.

This may involve disrupting long-held beliefs about learners and teaching. Fundamental to this work is replacing a climate of sorting and ranking students with one of mastery by believing and expecting that all students can achieve at high levels. In this inclusive climate, staff believes that in order to meet the needs of all students, it is necessary to meet the needs of each student. This philosophy drives a successful school.

The notion that all students can succeed is one of seven shared beliefs in *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. Our Shared Beliefs:

1. All students can succeed
2. Each student has his or her own unique patterns of learning
3. Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience
4. Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students
5. Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student’s literacy and numeracy development
6. Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports all students
7. Fairness is not sameness



Sharing Their **Why** at School and Beyond

By Anthony Perrotta

It's been over a year since COVID-19 became part of our shared educational vernacular. A year that challenged, inspired, exhausted, empowered and re-wrote not only the way that education is delivered, but conceptualized.

Within the COVID “we’re all in this together” mindset, truths of inequity became more pressing and relevant. Yes, “we’re all in this together” fighting an invisible foe. However, this macro level of societal connectedness differed from the micro realities that institutions, such as school districts and local schools, were forced to recognize.

For many Ontario students and their families, the inequity gaps of COVID education were real and existed well before the virus altered the world. From limited access to the technology needed to enable distance learning to

not having the day-to-day learning support that would empower students to thrive, the “we’re all in this together” motto reminded them they were alone. Coupled with cultural narratives taking place in real time during the pandemic, our students’ education – both in class and beyond – was being altered. From messaging on their phone of George Floyd dying on a sidewalk to political protests, racialized violence and acts of hate against the LGBTQ community, our students encountered what makes horror cinema so resonant. They lived and shared a common anxiety.

What does this provide Catholic education leaders with? Frankly, we have an opportunity that can't be lost. It's an opportunity to re-imagine, extend and broaden the understanding of student voice so that “we’re all in this



Empowering for Change

By Jennifer Casa-Todd

How do we define student voice? In looking at various studies over the last decade, I've found a number of significant definitions and examples.

Blau and Shamir-Inbal (2017), examined the role of digital technologies on student voice, defining it as not just listening to students, but valuing their views and treating them as equal partners. They reported positive effects when students functioned as co-designers and co-creators of the course content and their own learning experience. Lindgren and McDaniel defined student agency as providing students choice in their learning (2012). Dana Mitra (2018) looks at student voice as a pyramid consisting of listening at the bottom, collaboration in the middle and leadership at the top. Listening occurs when we consult school climate surveys to make decisions for students. Collaboration involves students providing input; with the adults both initiating and having the ultimate say in the outcome. Leadership, at the top of the pyramid, is where students make decisions while adults assist. Leadership happens less frequently; however, Mitra posits that when students have agency in the initiatives offered by their school, there are transformative effects on school culture and achievement. I contend we may need to re-examine the extent to which we provide students with the opportunity to help create a positive culture where students feel like they belong

and can make worthwhile contributions to their school community. We can do this by allowing them to take ownership of public relations initiatives, connecting them to others in the world, and empowering them to use their voices to create change.

In my book, *Social LEADia*, I shine light on a friend and educator, Rob Cannone, who created class committees in his class. He had an eco-committee, a tech committee and a public relations committee. Each student shared how they felt like they were a part of an important puzzle, which was their classroom, and that without them, the masterpiece would be incomplete. Let's take this same wisdom and apply it to our school culture. Who runs the school social media accounts, and what might it look like if we trained and rotated a student social media team to craft the "story of our school" under the guidance of a teacher-adviser or administrator? What about our websites? Could these be rotated through classrooms so that students take ownership of the school's story? Could students create a school podcast? The idea is to shine a light on the learning that is happening in our schools, while also teaching students valuable writing and publishing skills. In our school communities, whether it be elementary or secondary, there are budding bloggers, artists, podcasters and social media strategists. I've also noticed how reactive schools are when it comes to digital

I'm the Boss!

A Little Child Shall Lead Us

**By Rose Marie Perri-Gentilcore
and Alfonso Monachino**

Let's turn student voice on its head and approach it with a radically different mindset and lens. Many outstanding student voice initiatives are taking place across the province from student trustees and student senate, to youth summits and symposiums. These students are intelligent and articulate leaders, who are shaping strategic priorities, policy and the future vision of Catholic education in Ontario.

There is, however, a pocket of student voice that is equally powerful and explosive that is yet to be channeled into an authentic and transformational change in Catholic education. We are referring to our dysregulated students, our students melting down,

overturning desks, crawling on the floor, eloping from our classrooms and schools. We are speaking about our most vulnerable students whose flickering light needs to be used to ignite a fire within us to become transformational Catholic leaders.

Let us focus our lens over two thousand years ago to a vulnerable child born in a stable – homeless, poverty-stricken with parents filled with profound love and faith, but also with fear and uncertainty for this child's future. Removing our rose-coloured glasses, Jesus had many "behaviours" and expressed a full array of thoughts, feelings and emotions. Jesus could be viewed as defiant when He disobeyed his mother. He may be seen as



ELEVATE

NEW DATES

Together let's frame
the leadership
experience

In light of health and safety concerns related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the organizing committee has postponed ICP to 2022.
See our website for more details.



#ELEVATE2022

JULY 25-28, 2022

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Photo: Toronto Tourism



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