

Embrace the Spirit

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Religious and Moral Education Council
The Alberta Teachers' Association



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A Note from the Editor



This past winter has to be the longest one that I can ever remember living through, and this issue of *Embrace the Spirit* seems to have taken a long time to get together as well.

I think that you will enjoy the variety we have to offer.

First, you will get an introduction to the thinking of a keynote speaker for Conference 2014. Ray Guarendi has graciously given us permission to use one of his articles from his website (www.drray.com).

Briana Foster offers us a challenge in her article "Stop Fundraising and Start Changing: How Social Justice Should Be Approached in Schools."

We are all becoming familiar with the changes coming to education in Alberta through Inspiring Education. This isn't the first time that major shifts have happened in education. Those of us who are a bit longer in the tooth will remember the *Alberta Report* and its editor Ted Byfield. Byfield has long had an interest in education and was a founder of the Saint John's School of Alberta, a private school for boys that operated from 1967 to 2008. A few months ago a conversation with him led me to share some back issues of our journal with him. He was quite impressed with the quality of our publication. I took that as quite a compliment from someone who has been involved in journalism as long as he has.

Currently, Byfield is involved in an interesting project entitled *The Christians: Their First Two Thousand Years*. This 12-volume series is written in a more journalistic, populist style with wonderful illustrations. In the final volume, there is a subchapter on education and the influence of John Dewey. I invited him to contribute an article to our journal, which is a contraction of that story. As we embark on significant changes to education in Alberta, this is a great opportunity to reflect and consider the broader scope of education history, especially from someone who is not directly imbedded in the current system.

Our Kaleidoscope section features Elk Island Catholic Schools with contributions from Alene Mutala and Arlene Littlemore.

Jim Parsons offers a reflection on the "Power of Words."

As part of my Lenten commitment this year, I committed to reading several books. During that time I gave a second reading to one of the best introductory books I have ever read on classical ethics—*Ethics: The Drama of the Moral Life*. I offer a review of it in this issue.

Last, there is some preliminary information on our annual fall conference to be held October 24–25, 2014. We hope to see you there.

Dorothy Burns



From the President



Some say you have to be crazy to be a Christian. I don't know that they are referring to crazy as in a medically diagnosable condition but rather that it simply seems unreasonable to believe in the things Christians accept as true. Miracles, the Divinity of Christ, the resurrection of the Christ from the dead, Catholics worshipping what appears to be a wafer, can, without the eyes of faith, seem unbelievable. Faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, is what leads one to believe.

However, there is a type of crazy that people do have to be, if by crazy we mean that people are out of their minds. Christians need to be out of their minds and, instead, into

the mind of Christ.

At the fall of humanity, Adam and Eve were deceived into believing that, by their actions, their eyes would be opened and they would be like God, knowing what is good and what is evil. It is ultimately the belief that we know what is right and wrong more so than God that leads to sin and spiritual death.

As Christians we need to be out of our minds and into the mind of Christ so that when the time comes, we can, like Jesus, say not my will but thy will be done.

Carl Fakeley



Editorial Board 2014/15

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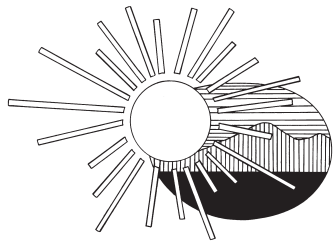
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Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association

Mission Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to inspire and foster learning communities by providing professional development for teachers to help them nurture the moral, ethical and spiritual lives of students.

Vision Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values

We are committed to serving teachers of all traditions and cultures, through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.



I'm Ba-a-ack!

Ray Guarendi

Ray Guarendi will be the keynote speaker for the upcoming RMEC conference. He is a father of 10, clinical psychologist, author, public speaker and nationally syndicated radio host. This article is reprinted with his permission from <http://drray.com>. Minor changes have been made to conform to ATA style.

Dear Dr Ray,
I can hardly visit with friends anymore because my children (ages five and three) interrupt us constantly. I send them to play but they keep returning.
—Conversationless

You have several options. One, quit visiting with friends. Tell them you have children now, and you won't be able to talk to any adults until your kids are teenagers and don't want to be around you anymore because you embarrass them. Two, tell your friends to stop interrupting you and your children. You'll talk to them if and when your kids have to go to the bathroom. But warn them to speak quickly. Three, teach your children to respect your visits with your friends by setting up some expectations for their behaviour.

Obviously you haven't chosen options one and two, because you still have friends left. I suspect you've tinkered with option three but have been frustrated by your kids crashing repeatedly through your expectations. I'm with you.

I like option three best, too. Shortly, we'll explore it.

There are good reasons for permanently interrupting your children's interrupting. First, even good friends can take only so many exasperating visits. Parents of intrusive children often find their circle of conversational friends shrinking. Second, though our culture has pretty much thrown off the attitude of past generations that children should be seen and not heard, the pendulum seems to have swung too far in the other direction. By allowing Oral to be heard whenever she wants, we don't teach her to respect other people's right not only to be heard too, but to hear people other than kids. Last, children are more likeable, to us and others, when we don't allow them to be obnoxious. When was the last time you heard, "You know, I just love the way your children feel so free and comfortable barging into our conversation any time they want."

One reason children are pushier than they used to be is because many experts have convinced parents to allow them to be. They need to have loads of attention, so goes the reasoning, to form healthy self-images. Therefore, when little Patience wants to talk, seeks your attention or approval, or just wants to show you something, you'd better drop what you're doing lest she feel neglected or unimportant.

In fact, a child will not suffer a stunted self-image by not getting every adult in his vicinity to suspend all conversations with others to meet his wants, however urgent he thinks they are. On the contrary, respect for grown-ups' relationships with others is a critical aspect of character. It helps kids accept that the universe is not here to rotate around them.

So how do you teach this respect? As you've probably already noticed, it's not enough simply to tell your kids, "We're visiting now. Go play." or "Please don't interrupt. Say, 'Excuse me.'" The kids will comply for a few tenths of a second, but they'll be back in full verbal force. You'll need to add some oomph to your requests. "Fulbright, please go play. The next time you come back and interrupt, you'll sit on the couch." In other words, put some consequences behind your expectations. You may have to repeat trips to the couch or wherever several times over the next few visits, but the kids will catch on. When mom says, "Don't be rude," she means it.

I wanted to say a few more things, but my kids are bugging me. I wish they'd let me write. Every time I sit down with a pencil, they start. I've told them a million times, "Daddy has to work," but I just can't get them to.

Stop Fundraising and Start Changing: How Social Justice Should Be Approached in Schools

Briana Foster

Briana Foster is in her final year of her education degree at the University of Alberta, with hopes of becoming a high school science and religion teacher

It is time to make a necessary shift in moral education, specifically when it comes to the idea of aiding social issues. Most schools base their teaching about social issues on school fundraisers such as food and clothing drives. The process of students helping the community has turned into classroom competitions with prizes. Is this really how future educators want students to think—“I did something good, so where’s my prize?”

There must be a shift in student mindset from “What can we do to help?” to “What can we do to stop this?” We need to encourage students to move away from a reactive approach to issues in society (for example, fundraising) to a proactive approach of centring on social justice, implying “fairness and mutual obligation in society: that we are responsible for one another, and that we should ensure that all have equal chances to succeed in life” (RSA nd). By incorporating social justice into all subjects and classrooms, we would encourage students to be engaged, proactively participate and critically reflect on social issues.

Consider the following story:

A couple of friends were down by the river and noticed a baby float by. Shocked, one quickly jumped in and swam to rescue the baby. The next day the same friends were down by the river and were once again shocked to notice two babies floating down the river. Again, one of the friends jumped in to save the baby. The next day, the same story—only there were four babies this time. This kept happening for almost a week—more babies each day. Finally the friends decide they had to do something to deal with this. They organized themselves, taking turns watching over the water and rescuing the babies as they floated down the river. The friends got friends involved, and before long the whole town was helping to rescue the babies floating down the river. But, the number of babies kept increasing. Then it dawned on someone, “Where are all these babies coming from? Why don’t we form a team to go upriver and see if we can stop the flow of babies at the source?” But some resisted saying, “If we go upstream who will operate the rescue operations? We need every concerned person here!” (Lum 2010)

I believe students should ask: “Where are all these issues coming from?” and take the trip upriver.

Social Justice and Current Education

When dealing with social issues, we teachers need to be less concerned with assessment and more concerned about engagement. We need to move past asking students to examine and reflect on social justice to proactively encouraging student engagement in social justice issues. For example, how should we introduce social justice? When asking my junior high catechism class if any had heard of the term *social justice*, I got blank stares. A few tried to define the term: “Isn’t it dealing with society and following the rules?” and “Isn’t it another term for capital punishment?”

Social justice is slowly entering Alberta’s education system. Inspiring Education (2010) named ethical citizenship as one of three goals for youth. An ethical citizen is someone “who builds relationships based on humility, fairness and open-mindedness; [and] who demonstrates respect, empathy and compassion” (p 6). *Framework for Student Learning* (2011) also states that students must develop competency in having a “social,

cultural, global and environmental responsibility” (p 4). This is achieved through students’ “potential to contribute to their communities, including as volunteers, [being] enhanced through their personal understanding of place and their ability to value fairness, equity and the principles of a democratic society” (p 6). By being “active participants in their local and global community, [students] act responsibly and ethically in building and sustaining communities” and have the chance to “see themselves as individuals and as active agents of a broader world” (p 6).

Until teachers adopt these curriculum goals, social justice will not be effectively taught. New literature must be added to the secondary curriculum to initiate a conversation about social justice. One recommendation would be McLaren, Padilla and Seeber’s (2009) book *The Justice Project*, a collection of stories and reflections regarding how social justice can be incorporated into numerous aspects of society. An easy read, it would allow students, with guidance from teachers, to understand how to view social justice and how to implement it in their own lives.

Social Justice in the Classroom

Social justice is especially relevant in a Catholic school setting where it might be perceived that teachers only discuss faith in religion class. However, for teachers and students to grow spiritually, social justice should permeate all subject areas. This will take designing new lesson plans and adapting programs of study outcomes to engage student learning. In science, for example, pollution and global warming would be

excellent subjects for social justice discussions. These issues affect both students and the global community. It is a prevalent topic across the programs of study for Grades 7–12 science, and by not asking, “What can we do to reduce or stop global warming?” students may never consider how current and future generations may suffer. Programs of study outcomes (Alberta Education 2009, 2005 and 2007) include Science 7: “identify examples of human impacts on ecosystems” (p 11); Science 10: “investigate and identify human actions affecting biomes that have a potential to change climate” (p 31); and Chemistry 30: “evaluate the impact of the combustion of various energy sources, including fossil fuels and biomass, on personal health and the environment” (p 46).

Besides traditional assignments of research and making a poster, I would increase student awareness of global warming and human impacts on the environment. Students could create and organize events within the school and community; for example, they could create a pollution campaign to inform other students about issues; they could organize a power-off day whereby students attempt to not use anything that requires power; or they could critically consider how society creates pollution and design solutions. The outcome would encourage students to critically reflect on their role in society and how they can proactively engage in social issues.

In religion I can see social justice being a prevalent topic in regard to local and global poverty. Catholic ideals centre on preferential options for the poor, “the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of His concern for the poor” (Catechism

of the Catholic Church nd, para 2444). To reflect on social justice would open the Bible in new ways for students. For example, “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothed you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:37–40, New International Version).

Such passages would help students to critically examine their roles as Christians. Books such as Paul’s (2004) *God in the Alley: Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World* would help students connect the word of God to the world of God and understand the importance of assisting our brothers and sisters created in God’s image, and that “[Jesus] came among the poor [and] dwelt with the weak” (p 12). Having students actively participate in the community expands these concepts. Include school field trips to shelters where students would come face to face with poverty and be able to deal with it more efficiently in their learning. Allow students to create their own social justice projects and reflect on how the project affected their faith. As well, change the typical spring break trip from such places as Europe to Second and Third World countries to aid in development. Growing up in North America, I personally experienced the shock of how the world really is last year in Guatemala. Students must have such experiences to be truly passionate about social justice at local and global levels.

Conclusion

Within the vocation of teaching, we should encourage students to grow in their faith, which must include teaching social justice. By doing so, students critically examine and reflect beyond the four walls of the classroom on injustices in society and what they can do to help—not what prize they get! Such changes need support from staff, parents and the school community. As well, further research and collaboration will be needed to see how to effectively incorporate social justice in the classroom.

Pope Francis I stated:

The inclusion or exclusion of the wounded person by the wayside defines all economic, political, social and religious projects. All of us, each day, are presented with the option of being good Samaritans or indifferent passersby (Collazo and Rogak 2013, 77).

As a teacher, my goal should be to shift the mindset of students

from indifferent passersby to good Samaritans through the idea of social justice.

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John Dewey—Education Reformer or ...?

Ted Byfield

*Ted Byfield is president of SEARCH (Society to Explore and Record Christian History), which he established to complete the 12-volume series *The Christians: Their First Two Thousand Years*. Formerly an Anglican, he is a convert to the Orthodox Church. He was the founding editor of the *Alberta Report* (which ceased publication in 2003).*

Only by the “transformative education” of adults, writes Ron Baier in the Winter 2012 issue of this journal, can we reverse the direction of the secularist culture that is sweeping the whole western world. Baier was chair that year of the RMEC annual conference, and in a perceptive introduction he warned that a very different task of religious and moral education now confronts the Christian teacher. No longer, he notes, is mere “nostalgia” for the past adequate to convey doctrinal certitudes to the next generation. Adults, not children, must change first, and that will require “a new vision that truly cultivates character and transforms believers into disciples.”

It’s hard to disagree with him. Yet there stands against him the figure of one man who, beginning about the turn of the 20th century, launched a revolution that played the central role in producing the social and cultural morass we find ourselves trying to live in today. In retrospect, he was not so much a reformer as a deformer. The world he helped bring about gives complete evidence of instability,

moral chaos and physical vulnerability. And yet his success in this dubious endeavour is astonishing. As an agent of social and cultural change through education he is unparalleled, because he accomplished this, not by changing adults, but by changing their children and the way their children were taught.

The man is known to history as the American philosopher John Dewey—or perhaps he is now largely unknown to it because he is seldom mentioned in the media today. Undeniably, however, his ideas are still deeply embedded in the faculties of education at the universities, faculties that were themselves a product of the movement he started. He looked nothing at all like the heavily bearded, scowling and fervid revolutionaries of his era. In marriage, manners and personal morals he was a model of social convention. The son of a street preacher, Dewey’s religious background was Congregationalist and his loyalty to that faith unwavering until as a philosophy professor in Michigan he met his future wife Alice Chipman. She helped change him from a devout Christian to a devout pragmatist, the philosophy that holds that whatever works is right. Dewey, however, never did quite define “works,” a distressing omission; because one man’s magnificently functioning paradise might be another man’s wholly dysfunctional hell.

In 1933, others defined his philosophy for him with the first

“Humanist Manifesto.” Its provisions represented a categorical rejection of the Christian religion. There is no creator, it declared. All rules of right and wrong are man-made and therefore changeable. Worship and prayer must go. Religious institutions must be abolished or transformed. A socialist political order must be everywhere established. Dewey was one of the manifesto’s 34 signers, about half of them Unitarians. His educational program sought to fulfill the vision of the manifesto, and it very nearly has.

By now he had established himself and his Columbia University Teachers College as the fount of a radically new method of education. For the ensuing four decades it carried, or claimed to carry, the credentials of the new era of science into the field of education, though in fact there was nothing “scientific” about it.

Students must no longer see themselves as being “judged,” declared Dewey. The concept of “blame” must be scrapped. Individuals must be made to see themselves as members of “the community.” If a crime is committed the community has failed, not the criminal. The concept of “the will” must be expunged, because the belief that the individual “chooses” between good and evil leads to the defeat of “selfhood.” Gender stereotyping must go. Such distinctions as “girls’ books” or “boys’ games” serve to perpetuate the old outmoded order.

Teachers ought not to function as authority figures, but as guides, counsellors and friends. Student desks must be rearranged to banish any suggestion of authoritarian leadership in the class. Students must learn to lead themselves. Any attempt by a teacher to impose structure—pass/fail, good/bad, right/wrong—was a form of “pedagogical abuse.”

All semblance of superiority/inferiority must vanish, along with imposed performance standards. Report cards must no longer carry grade standings, nor any student be singled out for a distinctly good performance, and certainly not for a bad one. Indeed the whole notion of good and bad must be removed from the child’s mind. “Self-esteem” must be encouraged in every possible way but never predicated on actual performance. Students should esteem themselves because they are selves, said Dewey, not because they have actually accomplished anything.

In brief, Dewey regarded the learning of skills as a more or less incidental by-product of education; his central aim was to turn children into “social beings.” In the higher grades “critical thinking” should be fostered, which meant questioning the assumptions of the old order, especially of parents. A student who challenged parental moral principles was deemed to be “thinking critically.” If the student continued in dutiful obedience, his or her education had failed.

Many teachers objected strongly to all this as unworkable, if not

diabolical, nonsense. There were other discordant voices. “Parents and students,” said one, “must be induced to abandon the educational path that, rather blindly, they have been following as the result of John Dewey’s teaching.” That voice belonged to President Dwight Eisenhower. One highly articulate opponent emerged in Canada. “Deweyism is not liberation,” declared Hilda Neatby, professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan, in her 1952 critique entitled *So Little for the Mind*. “It is indoctrination, both intellectual and moral, often forced upon the schools by ideological bureaucracies.” But in one school system after another, such resistance was gradually subdued. Deweyism could summon all the telling labels. It was new. It was “scientific.” We were living in a different world.

Few at first were ready to call attention to Deweyism’s other notable quality. By almost any objective standard, it didn’t work, a rather sad deficiency in a supposed product of “pragmatism.” By 1983, resistance had grown strong enough to prompt President Ronald Reagan to launch a detailed study of actual student aptitudes. This report—*A Nation at Risk*—showed that the US school system, once one of the world’s most proficient, was now one of the worst and declining steadily. A subsequent report 15 years later—*A Nation Still At Risk*—showed that despite Herculean efforts to improve, the system was still near the

bottom: 19th out of 21 nations in mathematics, dead last in physics. The cause of this catastrophe was plainly Deweyism. But how could the educators change it? By then, they knew nothing else.

Dewey died in 1952 at the age of 92, hailed almost universally as the genius who had so dazzlingly transformed the American school system. In 1968, his star still brightly shining, he was commemorated on a US postage stamp. Fifteen years later, however, the first *Nation at Risk* report disclosed a very different story. It concluded that his work was arguably the greatest disaster in the history of education in the western world.

To say he achieved this entirely by changing children is, of course, not quite true. What he changed was teachers, and they changed the children. Today, the whole western world seems leaderless, while also diligently discarding the Christian religion, as Dewey had urged. Perhaps we need another educational movement to restore to our society the Christian faith that first brought it into being and has sustained it century by century to the critically vital present one. For good or ill, teachers will as usual fulfill a vital role.

Note: This article is a contraction of the story on John Dewey, written by the author, which appears as a sub-chapter in the 12th and final volume of the series, The Christians: Their First Two Thousand Years. Check out the entire series at www.thechristians.ca/see-the-books.



Elk Island Catholic Schools

Alene Mutala and Arlene Littlemore

Elk Island Catholic Separate Regional (EICS) Division 41 originated in the Sherwood Park area in 1961. Today our staff of approximately 700 serve 5,700 students in 16 schools in the Catholic communities of Camrose, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park and Vegreville. The identity of the division is complex, as it contains within it both Roman and Ukrainian Catholic communities and works closely with seven parishes.

Our Mission

We are a Catholic community committed to developing educational opportunities in the context of gospel values, where students' gifts and talents are celebrated and nurtured through lifelong spiritual and personal experiences.

In our three-year faith plan that began in 2012/13, our division worked on EICS talks and reconfiguration of schools in the Sherwood Park area as we were fortunate to open a new Archbishop Jordan Catholic High School for the 2011/12 school year. Our theme was "Mission Possible." Our staff was given a Charter of Success and asked to create an environment and culture whereby we can see Christ in everyone

(which is part of our logo). Our superintendent, Michael Hauptman, presented us with this challenge: "Each day in every way be Christ for one another and ask yourself, whose feet did I wash today?"

Our 2013/14 theme is "Many Parts—We Are One Body in Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). This theme was fitting after a summer of moves and reconfiguration of schools in the Sherwood Park area. Superintendent Michael dressed as a Mr Potato Head to show the many parts and one body theme. Each school was presented a Mr Potato Head kit to use with students at their schools, and they were asked to participate in a contest to produce a video of theme. The school with the best video would win a staff lunch. Some of these can be viewed at www.eics.ab.ca.

Father Mike Dechant also spoke about the importance of all people belonging to community. Each staff member was given a cross necklace with the Trinity symbol intertwined on it, engraved with "One Body—EICS." This Trinity sign also symbolizes that our parishes, schools and parents work together in unity promoting Catholic education for students.

Our team leadership retreat with Father Ray Carey had our theme woven into "Shalom—Seeking Wholeness and Balance in Catholic Leadership" as well as "Covenantal Ethics, Principles of Agency, Confidentiality and Fiduciary Trust."

Our religious consultant, Alene Mutala, coordinates Catholic Education Sunday with the schools in all four communities showcasing the faith events of our schools as well as emphasizing the importance of Catholic education.

The administrators of nine schools in the Sherwood Park area that are attached to Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH) work with the parish team and coordinate many school masses at this parish throughout the year as well as a noon hour Ash Wednesday service with 1,000 students bused to OLPH parish. This year EICS also hosted the Holy Childhood Mass at OLPH parish on May 7.

Our religious consultant with the support of the REAL Foundation has brought in great faith presenters: Father Tony, Steve Angrisano, Mike Patin, Tony Melendez, Jacob and Matthew Band, Cooper Ray, Jackie Francois and Face to Face Ministries. These inspiring speakers are brought in for a week at a

time and present to all students in all four communities as well as to our staff on faith days. The REAL Foundation also supports us annually by giving faith leadership scholarships to one student in each community as well as sponsoring our high school students who attend Youth Day at LA Congress in Anaheim.



Tony Melendez with Alene Mutala.



Steve Angrisano at OLPH 2010.

A showcase of two of our schools follows:

St Martin's Catholic School, Vegreville

Faith Activities 2013/14

St Martin's has taken strides within the last year to create a vibrant faith community within our school. We were very thankful in 2013 to have Face to Face Ministries visit our school. The generous support of the REAL Foundation made this experience possible. Due to the success of that event, St Martin's made a commitment to bring Masson Normand, a former youth leader from Face to Face Ministries, back to St Martin's as part of his new ministry, The Pulse. Masson joined our school community in late October, and the day was filled with song, worship, prayer and faith activities in the classroom. The day was an amazing way to start the year.

In the summer of 2013 our local parish, St Martin of Tours, welcomed Father Michael Schumacher to the community. A wonderful relationship has been formed between the parish and school

because of the leadership of Father Michael and St Martin's principal Joseph Dumont. Both leaders made the development of a relationship a priority. In order to develop the relationship, Father Michael has opened the parish to our whole school community on a number of occasions. Father Michael's ability to teach is one of his greatest assets, and it has greatly impacted the students. Even more rewarding, however, has been our grade-specific teaching masses. Father Michael takes a great amount of time to go into detail about the mass celebration. All of our students are excited about attending each teaching mass. When asked about his experience, one Grade 4 male student replied, "It was awesome."

St Martin's continues to celebrate as a community each Monday morning with a prayer assembly. This year, teachers have pushed each other to create celebrations that are as engaging and faith filled as possible. Teachers have included videos, new songs and an increased focus on student reflection to the celebrations. Especially exciting is the increase in parent attendance at the assemblies.



Alene Mutala with Jacob and Matthew Bandat OLPH 2012.

Madonna Catholic School

Student PD Day 2014

As a teaching professional, I love PD days. What an opportunity to engage, collaborate and celebrate. Should it be any different for students?



Three years ago while in the midst of my own not-so-engaging PD session, I remember having what Malcolm Gladwell would call a blink moment—a slice of knowing without knowing. I leaned over to my assistant principal at the time and blurted out, “We should have a PD day for kids!” Alas, student PD day was conceptualized, and this past January, Madonna Catholic, in Sherwood Park, celebrated its third annual faith and wellness day.

Curriculum Redesign is one initiative helping to bring the vision of Inspiring Education to life. It is an opportunity to review Alberta’s provincial curriculum to ensure it is engaging, relevant and enables students to reach their full potential” (<https://education.alberta.ca/departement/ipr/curriculum.aspx>).



Madonna Catholic’s faith and wellness day merges seamlessly with Alberta Education’s vision, creating engaged, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit but focusing conscientiously on religious and moral education. The day provides students with opportunities to access workshops that allow them to learn how to further walk their faith, celebrate as a community and experience other wellness activities that they might not otherwise have a chance to participate in.

Organized like a traditional grown-up conference, students attend keynote sessions, lunchtime and closing concerts, and choose breakout sessions that suit their personalities and interests.



Face to Face Ministries, led by Jon Courchene and Clark Jaman, started the day off for us with a schoolwide assembly. With the premise of “to know God, to love God, to serve God, and get to heaven,” as the focus, Jon and Clark invited students from kindergarten to Grade 4, as well as staff and parent volunteers, to become active in living their faith and challenged all present to make Christ a priority in their lives. The involvement of students, their engagement in the sessions and their prayerful focus was a sight to behold.

Beginning by playing a simple melody on an Aboriginal



flute, followed by a softly spoken prayer for unity, Teddy Anderson attuned the school community to unity and oneness.

Through the imagery of coloured hoops used to represent the races of the world, Teddy impressed upon the students and school community to work together as one. “When we work together as one and when we accept diversity, we feel the Great Spirit connecting us as a unit. Alone we can feel weak, but

together, we feel strong.” Watching Teddy move fluidly



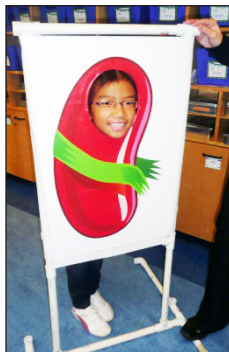
connecting hoops and dance moves into shapes of an eagle in flight or the united global community was incredible!



Teddy felt that he was also blessed by spending the day with our students and staff and commented, “the students and staff at Madonna were incredible. They were respectful, kind, smart and driven. It is always a blessing to travel from school to school sharing my passion and craft. To be able to share with wonderful students becomes the icing on the cake! Keep it up Madonna.”

Smaller breakout sessions continued during the remainder of

the day. Three Albertan authors were present for the day and shared their love of reading and writing as well as their personal passions for acceptance and inclusion.



Despite suffering from a debilitating disease, Alison Neuman's message to students "being different is a wonderful thing," was

not the focus of her talk, but rather that life is to be lived. Alison endeavoured to inspire students and encourage them to follow their dreams.

Camrose author Darcy Polny was an engaging and delightful author and illustrator who entertained students who varied in age from 6 to 10. Darcy shared how he, as an author, takes an idea, often from his own experiences as a child, and creates a whimsical story. By taking the students' photograph as a bean, to go with *Jelly Bean Jake*, or a bee, from *Stay Away from the Barn*, he made a connection with each and every one. The students loved the hands-on aspect of assisting Darcy in creating a chalk pastel painting that now hangs with pride in our school. Darcy also felt that his time



at the school was reciprocal. "The Madonna Catholic School motto, (is) Uplift the Heart, Engage the Mind, Inspire the Soul. These words rang true for me on our author visit to Madonna School faith and wellness day. The activities during the day showed that the school valued these qualities. I feel that our visits give all these aspects to the students. We give every child a photograph of themselves as a character from our book, because it is important that they are left with a feeling of self-importance and well-being. No one is left out. You are important to me."

Our third author, Hector Larrazabal, built on the theme of



the global community. His workshop was based on his popular book *Indian Lemonade*. Hector's focus on multiculturalism and diversity was honest about the struggles we all may have adapting to and accepting different ideas and opinions, but through teamwork and true collaboration, children succeed.

Other sessions were geared to physical health and wellness as well as the wellness and care of God's earth and creation.



From karate, self-defence, sugar shock, djembe drumming, a nature walk and journalling, students were truly able to seek and find their passions and work toward embracing the gifts that God has given us all.



Over the past few weeks that have transpired since student faith and wellness day, the culture and climate of the school continues to grow and blossom, unified as one community gathered in God.

In the words and poster gifted to us by Teddy Anderson, "Let your vision be world embracing."

For more information regarding the speakers and sessions, please see below:

- Face to Face Ministries
www.f2f.ca
- Teddy Anderson, Métis hoop dancer
www.hoopdanceproductions.com
- Hector Larrazabal
<http://adventuresnation.com>
- Alison Neuman, author
www.alisonneuman.ca/blog/main
- Darcy Polny, author
www.butterbeanbooks.ca/aboutus
- Nicole Balsdon, biologist
www.beatymuseum.ubc.ca
- Derek Jolivette, 2013 WKA and WTKA Unified World Muay Thai Champion
www.arashido.com
- Tina Yanitski and Carlos Mendes
<http://millwoods-karate.org>
- Elizabeth Driedger, music specialist
<http://madonna.eics.ab.ca>
- John Harmata, APPLE schools coordinator
<http://madonna.eics.ab.ca>

For more information, contact Arlene Littlemore, principal, at arlenel@eics.ab.ca.





The Power of Words

Jim Parsons

Jim Parsons is a professor in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Years ago I returned to the first school I ever taught in, in Louisville, Kentucky. I taught Grade 7, and after I overcame some early teaching mistakes, I loved it. In fact, I only taught Grade 7 and only for three years. I moved on quickly, escaping to the University of Texas to do a PhD. Mostly, I was running from a principal who simply didn't like me. He said once, "Mr Parsons, I would fire you if I had anyone else to take your place." But he didn't have anyone to take my place, and here I am.

I loved Grade 7. Grade 7 children are never too cool and are filled with surprises. I learned to laugh—a lot.

Louisville is 3,133 kilometers from Edmonton, so I missed the thrill of seeing the children I taught grow to be adults. I had one visit back. I was headed to a conference and stopped by for a couple days. My last Grade 7 class was now in Grade 12. I saw former students, renewed acquaintances, exchanged stories and even talked to parents. The most unforgettable part of my visit was meeting the

mother of a student I taught many years before.

"Mr Parsons, I have wanted to tell you this for so long. You changed my daughter's life," were her first words. I had never heard such words before, and it made me run through all the women's lives I had changed. Sadly, none came to mind. The mother pulled out a photo of a beautiful young girl. I didn't recognize her and said so.

"It's Sue! Sue is graduating this year. Sue is getting married soon. Sue is doing well. You changed Sue's life. You gave her confidence. Mr Parsons, I've wanted to thank you for years."

Something so wonderful should be remembered easily I thought, but I simply couldn't remember how I might have changed Sue's life. It turned out that the mother's enthusiasm rested on a single incident, which she recalled for me in great detail.

It happened during Christmas break. Sue had been dreading this break for a long time: she was scheduled to get braces. Whatever beauty she possessed, she thought, would be eliminated by the steely smile she'd soon possess.

Yes, she could see braces were necessary. Yes, she wanted straight teeth and a beautiful smile. Yes. Yes. Yes, to all those things. But it

wasn't fair. Why did she have to become metal mouth? The argument had gone on and on. Sue was finally ordered. There was nothing she could do about it; her parents knew best.

Unfortunately, complicating the stress, Sue also discovered during the holidays that her headaches would disappear if she got glasses. This second perceived blemish on her beauty caused her to balk. "You can make me wear these braces, but not the glasses."

"Yes, you will!" "No, I won't!" They had argued for days. Again the parents ordered. She would wear the glasses. They threatened her with untold horrors if she didn't.

This was where I came in. Ignorant of the glasses, the braces, the arguments, the threats and the ultimate stalemate, as always I waited outside the classroom door Monday morning after New Year's. When Sue arrived, the first thing I said was that I thought her new glasses looked really neat.

The whole interaction must have lasted about two seconds, but Sue's mother swears this single incident changed Sue's life. From that moment, Sue wore her glasses. She grew confident, became less introverted and was no longer embarrassed about her looks.

After I talked to that mother, I was pumped. My mind went over other exchanges I've had with students. Thousands? Millions? I started a mental list of the times my words might have had a similar positive effect on students and came up with about a dozen rather quickly. Then, horror. I began to mentally list the negative impacts comments I said might have had on others. Sadly, the number grew larger. I quit listing.

The lesson was powerful. Whenever I recall this story, I vow to never be thoughtless with my words.

Genesis 1:1–9 reminds us how powerful words are:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the

earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters, which were under the firmament from the waters, which were above the firmament: and it was so. And

God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

God spoke the Universe into existence: how powerful words are. Proverbs 18:21 notes: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." As teachers, our words carry power. In the same way God spoke the world into existence, we can speak our students into existence—building or destroying. I hope to never forget the goal of my teaching: "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26).



Ethics: The Drama of the Moral Life

**Piotr Jaroszyński and
Matthew Anderson, 2002**

Socratic Press

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www.adler-aquinasinstitute.org

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Reviewed by Dorothy Burns

This gem of a book, originally published in Polish as a high school textbook, has the endorsement of Blessed John Paul II. The Holy Father's note, in both Polish and English, to the original author, Jaroszyński, follows the table of contents. There is a preface to the English translation, along with an English translation of the original forward of the Polish edition.

This book systematically introduces the high school student to the vocabulary and philosophical principles of classical ethics. The style of the writer is engaging and makes philosophy accessible to the novice. It provides some solid rocks to stand on in the sea of relativism in which we find ourselves currently living.

The beauty of this book is that it builds a philosophical case for the moral life without any reference to religion until the final chapter. It clearly demonstrates that the moral life is built on rational thinking and is good for the

flourishing of human beings. Moral precepts are not some arbitrary decrees from an external authority but are rooted in our nature as human beings. This I believe is a message that needs to be heard by young people, given the antireligious bias in our current culture.

The table of contents demonstrates the breadth and depth of the material covered:

Introduction

1. Good and End: The Object of Human Acts
2. The Hierarchy of the Good
3. The Moral Being—The Decision
4. The Mode of Human Conduct—Aerteology
5. Conclusion: Morality and Religion

Lexicon

Chapter 4 is further broken down:

- The Virtue of Prudence
- The Virtue of Temperance
- The Virtue of Fortitude
- The Virtue of Justice
 - Legal Justice
 - Commutative Justice
 - Distributive Justice
- The Interconnection of the Virtues
- Is Eudaimonism Selfishness?
- The Theory of Natural Law: Do Good!

The end of each chapter has study and reflection questions and suggestions for supplemental reading.

I enjoyed it so much that I gave it a second read and found myself jotting down quotes that I found particularly articulate and illuminating. Here are a few examples:

Chapter 1—"Each of us knows that nothing can force us to want something. ... Something might exert great pressure on us, whether this is a threat, or hope of gain and pleasure, but it is entirely up to us whether we allow ourselves to be swayed by these factors. ... Indeed, we can resist any such influence, because we always have the option of saying no." (p 2)

Chapter 2—"Truth consists in the agreement of our cognition with some real state of affairs that is ultimately based in existence." (p 22)

Chapter 3—"When we make a choice, we are not merely changing things we are changing ourselves. ... By our decisions we shape ourselves." (p 29)

And one of my personal favorites for a world where people think that all opinions are equally valid and a lot of "debate" generates more heat than light.

Chapter 5—"The new tolerance, however, is often a deliberate tool of manipulation. In the name of tolerance, we are forced to overlook violations of justice. In the name of tolerance, we treat the common good as if it were personal property. We allow each person to say or do as they wish. A torrent of lies and deception is

let loose and we defend it, thinking that we are defending the right to personal convictions. However, if a person's views are his personal goods, why does he need to make them public? If someone makes his views public, they are no longer private, and other people have the right to take a position on them.

Others can measure them by objective criteria, not merely as the views of some private person. When we defend lies and deception in the name of a personal right to opinion, we are confusing the private and public order." (p 124)

The experience of one of my colleagues who has used this book

with students as a supplementary resource in Religious Studies 35 is that students become very engaged with the content and it has a positive effect on their thinking.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone who would like to refine their thinking regarding the moral life.



RMEC Annual Conference

October 24–25, 2014

Banff Springs Hotel

“You’re a Better Teacher Than You Think: Words of Wisdom”

Keynote Presenters



Ray Guarendi

Ray Guarendi is the father of 10, clinical psychologist, author, public speaker and nationally syndicated radio host. He will lead three sessions: You Are a Better Teacher Than You Think, Why Be Catholic and Back to the Family. Check him out on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Raa45wCt9bA).



Michael Duggan

Catholic Women’s League chair of Catholic studies at St Mary’s University College with a PhD in Biblical studies, author and international speaker. He will be speaking about and displaying the *Saint John’s Bible*, which is the first handwritten and illuminated Bible in more than 500 years. Check him out on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VvkQMqqYbxw)!

Commissioned in 1998 by the Benedictine monks of Saint John’s Abbey and University in Minnesota, the *Saint John’s Bible* was created by a team of scribes, artists and craftspeople in a scriptorium in Wales under the artistic direction of Donald Jackson, one of the world’s foremost calligraphers and the Scribe to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Reflecting the construction of its medieval predecessors, the Bible was written on vellum, using quills, natural handmade inks, hand-ground pigments and gold leaf while incorporating modern themes, images and technology of the 21st century.



Guidelines

The RMEC newsjournal *Embrace the Spirit* is published to

- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

- Classroom and school projects
- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word format. The manuscript should include a title page that states the author's name, professional position, address and phone number(s). Submissions should be typed and double-spaced and may be any length to a maximum of 5,000 words. References must appear in full in a list at the end of the article.

Send contributions or enquiries to the editor: Dorothy Burns, 1 McRae Street, Box 1318, Okotoks, AB T1S 1B3; phone 403-938-6051 (res) or 403-938-4265 (bus); fax 403-938-4575; e-mail dburns@redeemer.ab.ca.

The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and space, reviews all submissions.

