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# Exemplary Practices

2014


## Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Canada

This publication is also available online in HTML at www.pma.gc.ca.

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Cat. No. Iu1-2/2014E-PDF
1929-7882

Aussi offert en français sous le titre *Prix du Premier ministre pour l'excellence dans l'enseignement - Pratiques exemplaires 2014.*

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# Prime Minister's Awards Teaching Excellence 2014 Exemplary Practices

One of the most enjoyable parts of the four days national Prime Minister's Award (PMA) recipients spend in Ottawa is Teachers' Talk. The sharing that takes place during this best practices session is motivating and memorable for both the participants and those in the audience privileged to hear these extraordinary educators speak first hand. Sometimes funny, often moving, and always inspirational, the unique ideas and innovative solutions these top teachers have found to common challenges will be of service to anyone interested in excellence in education and early childhood education. Teachers' Talk Moderator Dr. Joel Westheimer opened the event by saying,

> "Some people think of teaching as a way of pouring information into children who are empty vessels. Paulo Freire talks about this as the "banking method" of education, where the teacher deposits information into the child and then makes a withdrawal during examinations… I think that education, and teaching in particular, is about creating a space in the classroom where children's imagination and abilities can flourish. And that's hard work on the part of teachers. When I read through the projects that we will be celebrating today, and the work that you're all doing, it really reminded me that the role of the teacher is a challenging and an ambitious one."

Dr. Westheimer is the University Research Chair in Democracy and Education at the University of Ottawa and an Education Columnist for CBC Radio.

Topics for discussion at Teachers' Talk are drawn from recipient's nomination packages and are based on what they feel are their best and most transferable teaching practices. Reflecting the growing trend in Canada toward integration, recipients of both the PMA for Teaching Excellence and for Excellence in Early Childhood Education take part in the same forum. Topics for 2014 were: "Fostering the Wonder of a Child" – Inspiring Learning Through Emergent Curriculum; « Une démarche bienveillante » – Building Foundations for Lifelong Learning; "No Child Left Behind" – Ensuring Success for All Students; "Learning in Common" – Collaboration to Support Student Achievement; "If you Build it…" – Using STEM to Inspire and Engage; and finally, "Child-Lived Experience" – Challenging Students in Learning for Life. Summaries of these best practices, as well as links for the resources these educators use regularly in their classrooms and childcare centres can be found in this publication.

The Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines who instill in their students a love of learning and who utilize information and communications technologies to better equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in a 21st century society and economy. The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education honour exceptional ECEs who excel at fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and at helping build the foundation young children need to make the best possible start in life. Each recipient's biography highlights the teaching philosophies and best practices of some of Canada's most inspirational educators.

The Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education are administered by Industry Canada in partnership with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and with the generous support of the RBC Foundation. For information about this program, its partners and recipients, please contact the program office.

# Teaching in the Northern Context: Essential Skills and Best Practices to Ensure Engagement and Success


## Gordon Billard

**John Arnalukjuak High School**

Arviat, Nunavut


**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

English, Drama, Audio-Visual Production for Grades 9-12

Arviat, Nunavut is about 250 km due north of Churchill, Manitoba and is located on the west coast of Hudson Bay. It is fly-in only; isolated; flatter than the Prairies; not a tree for hundreds of kilometres. It is home to 2,500 souls–90% Inuit. It gets frightfully cold and the blizzards really are the stuff of legend.

There are many challenges that come with teaching in northern Canada. Internet service is significantly slower than in the south (500 times behind Toronto in cost per kilobyte). We have, reportedly, the highest birthrate in the country. More than 50% of the population is under 25 years old. The open adoption system makes it very hard to keep family names consistent. Most students' grandparents were born on the land in igloos or sod huts. Many parents either went to residential schools or did not finish school in the current southern-styled system. Consequently, many children are not encouraged to go to school, so attendance is disturbingly low.

Inuktitut is the first language of almost all Inuit here. It is more widely used here than almost any other hamlet in Nunavut. Strong language skills are a must–English as a second language, in particular. A policy of inclusion and incorporation of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (traditional knowledge) into all areas of the curriculum challenges the skills of almost all new teachers. Cultural empathy is a key trait. In the past, traditional learning involved careful observation, intent listening and little talk. It still does. I learned to speak more slowly, more clearly, more intentionally and less often. My students also taught me to recognize cultural paralinguistic signals. Many times, a question will be answered with a facial expression. Raised eyebrows means "yes"; scrunched up nose means "no". If you really mean "NO!", then stick out your tongue at the same time.

Teaching in Nunavut has been a challenging yet extremely rewarding experience. When I arrived in Arviat, I realized that I was in a privileged position to help develop the full potential in my students. I began learning the language and using it immediately. I co-wrote and facilitated the translation of plays and produced plays of literary works students study in English and Drama classes. I made it extremely clear that every student was able to participate in all drama productions. I produced plays and videos that dealt with current social issues that were relevant to my students, such as: suicide, bullying, and drug abuse. I also assisted in the creation of a "Mac Lab" in the school where Audio-Visual Production students and members of the Arviat Film Society learn how to edit videos. I actively participated in the establishment of a community television station with the control centre being housed in the school's "Mac Lab".

Teaching in a remote community requires you to have the skills to deal with multiple grade levels in all of your classes. You must be flexible in your thinking. Knowing how multiple intelligences lead to differentiation of instruction, which is also guided by individual educational and behavioural plans for many, is a valuable skill. I quickly learned that constant encouragement will increase student engagement and success. I make sure to constantly praise and support my students. Never forget that a small action can lead to a great success!

# A Classroom Without Walls


## Glyn Davies

**Anderson Elementary School**

Richmond, British Columbia


**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

All subjects for Grades 6-7

Every child is an expert in something. They may not always realize it, but as we begin each school year, students are taught how to purposefully study, create, and then share their expertise with others. What students learn in school today is not much different than it has always been, but how they are learning is an adventure.

Each child is unique and has his or her own life experiences, family, and style of learning. I identify each child's prior knowledge and what he or she loves, by talking with them one-on-one about many topics of interest. I also listen carefully to their comments in class discussions, talk with their parents, and conduct surveys that help provide background information about the child as an individual and what they know.

Students are intensely motivated to immerse themselves in our "classroom" environment where they get to create spaceships, underwater tunnels, dragster circuits and more! They experience learning on an intimate level and become empowered as they work as a hands-on scientist, astronaut, engineer, physicist, tour guide, or any other professional. They experiment, predict, communicate, hypothesize, infer, and problem-solve in a real-time, real-life manner. They build rockets, boats, balsa dragster cars (our record is 112 km/h), rollercoasters, and the list goes on!

We begin our teaching units by introducing concepts and ideas with visuals, and discussions ensue about the adventure we are about to embark upon–an adventure in learning that goes far beyond basic worksheets and tests. Our early discussions involve hooking students with a heartfelt purpose for what they are about to learn, and how they can each contribute to our community learning by sharing with schoolmates, family, friends, and community members about the amazing topics of study that we investigate. We then sit in an empty "blank canvas" area and the students imagine what the "no limits", ultimate way of learning, would be.

In our recent extreme space project, I received over 100 pages of ideas and drawings from 30 students. We reviewed the ideas together, finding a workable plan of what was needed, and what we wanted to learn in order to teach others in an exciting and compelling manner.

We create our written research by learning how to access information using library, video, human, and internet resources. Students put learning into action as they build what they have learned, and practice role-playing of real people. The end result is an amazing hands-on, interactive tour of our special environment (from Egyptian museums, jungles, space centers, to aquariums and coral reefs), to large numbers of visitors in our school and community, with our students being the marine biologists, astronauts, engineers, doctors, and more! Students teach one-on-one, with purpose! Our excitement becomes contagious as we bring learning to life by taking lessons beyond the classroom.

The students are aware that I care about them and their learning, and that is further motivation in them pushing forward with passion and purposeful learning. I am so privileged to work with such amazing young people!

# The Importance of Teaching Social Media Literacy Skills in Schools


## Sylvia Duckworth

**Crescent School**

Toronto, Ontario

**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

Core French for Grades 3-5


I often think about what we need to teach our students to best prepare them for the age of digital technology. First of all, I believe that every child should have an opportunity to learn essential computer skills (including computer programming). I was thrilled when the Ontario government announced that it has committed to $150 million in funding for school boards to promote technology in the classroom over the next three years. This is definitely a step in the right direction.

In addition, I believe that we need to teach students about how to properly use and leverage social media. For many very good reasons, social media has been given a bad rap in the past few years. There have been far too many cases of cyberbullying with tragic results. However, social media is not going to go away. It is here to stay and we as educators have a responsibility to teach students how to use it properly. Instead of banning it from our classrooms, we need to embrace it and model the many great ways that it can be used.


In 2012, a Minnesota teenager, Kevin Curwick, got tired of seeing his classmates being bullied on Twitter. He created a Twitter account dedicated to handing out compliments to people in his school community. The movement he started has since gone viral, as school after school set up similar Twitter accounts. Many teachers have also set up Twitter accounts collaboratively with their own classes to make connections with other students around the world. This is often followed up with video-conferencing, blogging, and collaborating on projects together. What a marvellous way to teach students empathy and tolerance toward other cultures, not to mention a wonderful way to practice speaking in another language!

On a personal note, because of social media and the resources and ideas made available to me by my Personal Learning Network (PLN), I regularly undertake initiatives in my classroom that I would not have known about otherwise. My students and I have been able to create and collaborate with the students of my PLN around the world on many projects. It has been so rewarding and educational for all of us.

Probably the most gratifying aspect of social media for me is the sense of connectedness that I develop with other educators around the world. If I have a question, I put it out on social media and get an answer or a suggestion within minutes. When I travel, I meet face-to-face with educators I have met on social media and it seems like I am reuniting with a long lost friend. When I meet fellow teachers at conferences or educational retreats, social media permits us to keep in touch in a very easy and accessible way and allows us to continue conversing about best practices in education.

In conclusion, I believe that students across Canada need to learn essential computer skills and that teaching the proper use of social media should be part of every school's curriculum. Employers now look online to determine a candidate's suitability for a job so it is critical that we teach our students how to be responsible digital citizens and how to create a positive digital footprint. Instead of shying away from social media, let us open our minds to wonderful ways that it can be used to connect with other people and cultures around the world.

# Never Stop Learning


## Rick Hubert

**Smithers Secondary School**

Smithers, British Columbia

**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

Metal Work for Grades 8-12


One of the things I truly love about teaching is that I continually get to learn new things which I have the privilege of passing on to my students. What makes it even better is if the knowledge I pass on has a positive impact not only on my students, but on their families and the community.

This past year has been an incredible year for learning for me. I am very passionate about healthy living and how important nutrient-rich foods are for optimal health. I discovered that the food we eat today is lacking many of the nutrients we need to live healthy, vibrant lives. After a lot research, I discovered the root cause of this problem. Much of the soil used in agriculture has become depleted of essential nutrients causing a reduction in the mineral content of food crops. But what can we do about it? I decided to learn about soil analysis and how to grow nutrient-rich food. From there, I decided to build a geodesic dome greenhouse with a group of students. I also wanted to be able to grow quality produce year-round so the greenhouse needed to be heated. I took a course on building a biomeiler (composting heater) and arranged to have it built with the help from members of the community. The biomeiler was able to produce a great deal of energy and heat (12 kw/hr or 40,000 btu/hr). It is also able to produce humus–an organic material that contains the many useful nutrients needed for healthy soil.

I tried to involve students from different areas of the school in this project. The building of the geodesic dome involved carpentry students and special-needs students helped plant, harvest and sell the produce that we grew. A few students were hired to run the greenhouse over the summer break which involved coordinating with Ground Breakers (a local gardening group) to sell our produce at a local farmers market.

If you want to make a difference, I encourage you to find something you are truly passionate about and jump in with both feet. But remember, getting involved in a project you love can become all consuming. One thing I have also learnt from this project is that you also need to take time for yourself since it is very easy to burn out.

The internet was an incredibly valuable research tool for this project considering that a lot of advancements in agriculture are not yet captured in books. If you are interested in furthering your knowledge about modern agriculture and how it affects your health, I recommend looking up the works of John Kempf, Arden Anderson and Michael Astera. Never stop learning!

# "If You Build it…" – Using STEM to Inspire and Engage


## Stan Hunter

**Orchard Park Secondary School**

Stoney Creek, Ontario


**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

Computer Science, Computer Engineering for Grades 9, 11, 12

Where I find my most successful teaching is actually outside of the classroom. Building robots that compete on the world stage has developed many skills in myself, my students and families in our school community. Students in our afterschool robotics program learn without realizing it, and they become passionate, engaged and encouraged to communicate, network, and develop technical and non-technical skills. This robotics experience also builds into my classroom with practical examples and projects–robots are used throughout computer engineering courses from grade nine to twelve.

Our school robotics team, team 2056, competes in the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition in Ontario and the United States. We have six weeks to design, build, and program a robot to compete with and against 30 to 50 teams at various regional events.

From networking with other like-minded students from around the world, to meeting and learning from experts in the fields of robotics, computer science and business, the opportunities at these competitions are endless. Students learn how to be leaders and gain real-world, hands-on technical skills. The robot that our team builds has to work and work well to compete. Problem solving, collaboration and teamwork are fostered along with all the skills learned from expert team mentors.

Our team has a large focus on community service. Students learn that their world is not isolated and they can give back to the community via a number of ways–from food drives, to recycling electronics and metal; from mentoring younger students at the library, to collecting gently used clothing for the Canadian Diabetes foundation; from helping local service clubs collect funds, to volunteering at local events and participating in Cancer Rides. The team cultivates good citizens, lifelong learners, and a mentality of excellence in all we do.


The team also engages students from many areas of the school–from business and marketing to machine shop and tech design, from computer programming to video and media arts. Students work together to move the team forward and they all have a common goal and a passion to excel and succeed. This passion and engagement then pours into their classes (they must keep up their school work to be on the team). But even more than that, the standard of excellence and the culture of the team builds a desire in the students to be even better in their courses and to strive for achievement in classes that they may not particularly like or necessarily do well in.

Not every school can have a competitive robotics team; they are costly and require a large amount of resources. However, there are many other levels of robotics engagement available. VEX, VEX IQ, FIRST Tech challenge, FIRST Lego League and Skills Canada competitions can give students at your school that little extra to keep them engaged and excite their passion for science, technology, engineering and math.

# Educational Robotics – A Holistic and Inclusive Approach to Teaching STEM


## Tom MacIsaac

**Father Patrick Mercredi High School**

Fort McMurray, Alberta


**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

Engineering and Robotics for Grades 7-12

"*I hear and forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.*" – Confucius

Educational robotics has been a passion of mine for many years. I started by mentoring a Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) underwater robotics team as a new technology teacher. As a pilot teacher for the newly released skilled trades and technology program, I trained over several summers to teach the program courses. One course that really challenged me and solidified my interests in robotics was the High School Robotics course.

To provide teachers with tools to facilitate and teach Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) topics, I designed a project with the Computer Science department that facilitated the use of Lego Mindstorm Robotics in a Grade 6 and Grade 8 Science and Math classes. During the project, robotics helped create a fun and engaging learning environment. The computer-programming component of robotics proved to be a tremendous problem solving tool for the students, and solving assigned problems through robot design and construction proved equally as challenging.

Last year, I created the RSports (Robotic Sports) group at our school that encompassed all four robotics groups we supported. Each type of robotics has a course that is associated with it, creating a curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular robotics environment. The initial benefits of robotics were felt by many of our students that just needed a place for their unique interests, abilities and perspectives to flourish. I have strived to create a welcoming and nonjudgmental environment for students with the belief that everyone can contribute. I also believe that STEM topics become more tangible for students when placed in practical contexts as they work with professionals to design, fabricate and program their robot platforms.

Students have responded well to robotics at our school but, as educators, we must ensure that our instructions and expectations are very clear. I found out very quickly that robotics is intimidating for many of the students. Helping students vocalize these feelings and address the origins of their fears very quickly brings many in. Robotics has been a great tool to encourage student critical thinking and problem solving, as well as the development of interpersonal skills that translate well to the workplace.

If an educator wants to include educational robotics as part of their practice, there are several things to consider. Robotics at any level can become very expensive and its benefit as an educational tool will be questioned. The major level of support required is monetary; educators will need financial support to begin purchasing simple robotics systems that are reusable. As administrative and community support grows, the level of broader support should evolve with it. It is imperative that the entire education community gets involved with the implementation of robotics.

One of the greatest challenges I have faced has been validity–are there not cheaper ways to engage our students? I advise all educators that there must always be considerable amount of structure and transparency in this endeavor. What are the benefits? I quickly learned that robotics was a great vehicle to accommodate different learning styles, abilities and at the same time facilitate the interpersonal growth that is a benchmark of success.

# Building Blocks for Physical Literacy – Physical Literacy Class


## Susan Marshall Steele

**Astral Drive Elementary School**

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia


**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

Physical Education for Grades Primary-6

Most of us are aware that, for optimal growth and development, children need up to 60-90 minutes of physical activity every day. This is critical for their current health and well-being and for their future. One of the many barriers holding children back from achieving this goal is a lack of physical literacy.

*"Physically literate individuals have the competence and confidence to participate in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the development of the whole person."*

– Physical Health & Education Canada

If we think of the ABC's as the building blocks of literacy and the 123's as the building blocks of numeracy, then the building blocks of physical literacy are the Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS) like running, throwing, jumping, kicking and catching. Having these skills means a child can play a varsity sport, catch a set of keys or mountain climb. They would be able to play a game of hockey with friends or snowshoe in the woods with their family. Without these skills, they would feel relegated to the sidelines and miss out on activities that would enrich their life and maintain their health. If a child is not physically literate, they will also be more likely to lack self-esteem.

With the support of my colleagues, Astral Drive Elementary's Physical Literacy Class was created to give children a safe place to develop their FMS and to gain the confidence and competence to participate in a wide variety of physical activities. This class has been summarized as a "resource support for physical education".

Students in grades primary to six who struggled with their FMS, or who were falling behind their peers as the physical activities became more complex, were invited to attend the Physical Literacy Class once a week for 30 minutes. Great care was taken to ensure a safe, supportive environment where all students felt comfortable working on their FMS at a level that was appropriate for them. Older students also attended and helped the younger students with their development.

Together, we built a sense of community where it was fun and safe for all children to improve their FMS and positive things started to happen. Attitudes began to change and students who were reluctant to participate in physical activity were having success and suddenly feeling good about themselves. Students who had originally showed little interest in developing their FMS were now practicing their skills at home. Confidence and competence increased dramatically and positive attitude towards physical activity became apparent.

There were barriers to overcome to implement the program but creative scheduling, teamwork and sacrifices like the PE teachers giving up prep time to run the program and classroom teachers giving up instructional time to release the children made Physical Literacy Class a reality. There is true merit to this program and when run properly, it has a significant and positive impact on the health and well-being of the students involved. Physical literacy for all is an achievable and worthwhile goal for our educational system.

# Big Questions in the Classroom


## Tiffany Poirier

**Prince Charles Elementary School**

Surrey, British Columbia

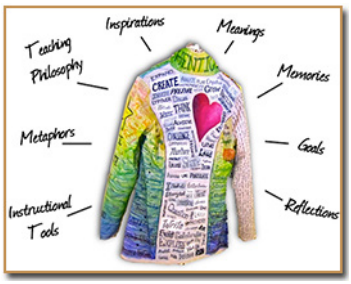
**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

All subjects except French and Music for Grades 3-7; Challenge Program


Question! Question! Question! Have you ever been surprised or tongue-tied when a child asks you a really big question? Here are a few philosophical ponderings I've heard from students in my work as an elementary school teacher:

- A 13-year-old asked, "How do I know what I should do with my life?"
- While colouring, an 11-year-old mused, "Can you make a brand new colour that doesn't exist yet?"
- After presenting me with his newspaper clipping for "Current Events", a 10-year-old asked, "Ms. Poirier, why do countries drop bombs on each other? How do you make world peace?"

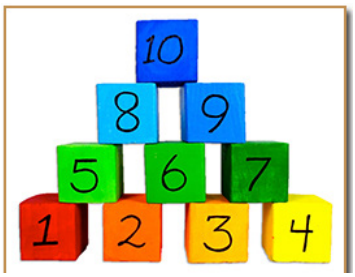
So what can we do to help young people explore their big questions and find their own meanings and answers? Here are three practices that I use to nurture, inspire, and empower young questioners.




1. The Teaching Coats Project: First and foremost, I am passionate about co-creating with students a safe learning environment where all children can feel seen, heard, and honoured for who they are. In our class, we begin with a whimsical, arts-based inquiry into the questions of "Who are we?" and "What are the threads that connects us?" I share with students my Teaching Coat: a white lab coat I transformed by collaging various quotes, questions, reflections, symbolic images, and memorabilia that tell my story and illustrate my approach as a teacher. Then, students reflect and express who they are as learners by creating their own Learning Coats. We wear our hearts on our sleeves as we analyze and discuss our meaning-rich garments, explore identity, share wisdom, and try on each other's coats to learn perspective taking.

2. Community of Inquiry: Imagine a classroom where 7- and 8-year-olds are seated peacefully in a dialogue circle on the carpet, thinking deeply, and enraptured in a Philosophy for Children (P4C) session. This is a Community of Inquiry where students explore big questions such as "What is happiness?" "What is justice?" and "How can we make the world a better place?" The students pass around a talking stick—or perhaps another evocative object from a student-created Inquiry Kit—as they respectfully debate and share their own insights, analysis, and well-reasoned arguments they have learned how to construct. In these dialogues, the teacher is a facilitator: he/she is not there to provide answers, but rather to listen intently, document ideas, referee a safe space, and challenge the children with further questions that deepen their inquiry. This dynamic, complex, and beautiful process is a powerful way to improve students' engagement and academic performance, while teaching transferable skills in critical thinking, creativity, metacognition, and communication.

3. Personal Interest Projects: Every child has infinite gifts to discover and share with the world. I am committed to treating the questions,




dreams, and goals of every one of my students with reverence—as if they belonged to a future Craig Kielburger, Jane Goodall, Emily Carr, or Martin Luther King Jr. But how do we nurture students to find their unique passions and gifts in the first place? And what can we offer a young person who says, "I have a dream!"? My solution was to develop the 10-Step Personal Interest Project (P.I.P.) framework to empower students of any age through open-ended inquiries. Whether a student is writing a novel, designing a board game, presenting a TED-style speech, or working on any other big goal, the P.I.P. framework provides inspiration and well sequenced and structured support to build confidence and help students achieve success and make their mark.

# The Importance of Collaboration

John Procyk
**Point Grey Secondary School**
Vancouver, British Columbia

**Subjects and Grades Taught:**
Science for Grades 8-12, Leadership for Grade 12

Collaboration on several levels is key to the success of the Vancouver District Enrichment Program for which I am the head teacher. Our Mini School comprises a maximum of 150 students from Grades 8 through 12. We have six teaching staff. We all teach in both the Mini School and the larger Main School that we are affiliated with. Our mandate is to provide an enriched education to bright and motivated high school students from across Vancouver. Our classes are gender balanced and reflect Vancouver's ethnic diversity.

We have professional autonomy to enrich the education in our own classroom. However, collaboration between staff is crucial to successfully provide a wide variety of local and extended field trips. It is imperative to have a tight knit staff. We meet on a regular basis to plan and implement enrichment activities and to critically assess everything that we do. New initiatives and cross-curricular educational opportunities are both supported and encouraged.

Our program could not function at the level it does without the inclusion of our parent community. Our parents are our best allies! At the start of the year, I collect a list of parents that are willing to share their talents and passions with our students. We all benefit when parents can be involved in the education of their children. We will often bring in parents to talk about such things as Shakespeare, medical issues and Science Fair projects. Parents accompany us on field trips and will lead workshops while we are away at camp. Parents will often inform us of enrichment opportunities that become available in the community. We have approximately 75% of our students involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program that I oversee. I enlist the help of our parents in providing opportunities for service, skill building, physical recreation and the outdoor education components of Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program. We run a few family events during the school year that bring our whole community together. We maintain a close link with our parents through our school email system and they are encouraged to contact us if they ever have any concerns. A feeling of family exists between our staff, students and parents.

Financial restraint in the public sector became an issue for our program about a decade ago. We were reduced from six blocks of teaching time allocated to planning to one block and 1.8 support staff was cut back to a .5 position. Teacher burnout was a distinct possibility if we were to try and maintain the status quo in our program. I decided to create a Leadership class open to our thirty Grade 12 students. The black cloud of restraint turned out to have a massive silver lining! Our senior students help us plan and organize four school trips each year, mentor our new Grade 8 class and often develop a buddy system between the Grade 8 and 12 students. The Leadership class plans a formal winter prom with our parents, are a part of an information night for new applicants, organize numerous lunchtime and afterschool workshops and activities for their peers and produce a talent night for our community. We are also very proud of the liaison that exists between our Leadership class and the Life Skills class in our Main School. Our students have been paired with higher functioning autistic children so that they can be active participants in regular physical education and art classes. We now do more enrichment than ever because of the involvement and dedication of our student leaders.

Collaboration is the glue that holds our program together and ensures its success!

# Together It Can Be Done


## Jennifer Tieche

**Carson Graham Secondary School**

North Vancouver, British Columbia

**Subjects and Grades Taught:**

Teacher-Librarian for Grades 8-12


Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to teach alongside many amazing educators and I have had the pleasure of working with, and learning from, exceptional and inspirational young people. Time and again they have proven to me that when people see beyond their limits and create opportunities to work together, a great deal gets done.

In my 12 years as a teacher, curricular leader, and teacher-librarian, I have been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time—that is, a place in desperate need of transformation, and in the company of caring and intelligent visionaries who were willing to take the risk with me to try to realize change and create welcoming environments where all students feel they belong. Creating a place where students feel safe, and are safe, regardless of who they are and what their social context is, however glorious or gruesome. A place where students are celebrated and supported socially, emotionally and academically, and where they are challenged beyond their personal limits. I advocate for the resources my students and colleagues need and put students first to increase success, respect and opportunities for all members of my community.

When I began as a special education teacher, I taught students with learning disabilities their modified academic courses in a segregated environment. School for them had been a terrible place of perpetual failure and low self-esteem. They deserved better. What I soon realized was that they deserved an inclusive school where their learning was enriched, authentic, personalized and meaningful. They deserved to be in subject specialists' classes learning alongside their peers. They needed acceptance and desegregation. I found myself collaborating with like-minded colleagues to dismantle the segregated structure of the Aboriginal and Special Education programs at one of the most diverse secondary schools in the city. At the same time, I was also building a library resource program and transforming that space from a silent 'warehouse' of underutilized materials to a technologically rich learning commons alive with energy, enthusiasm and budding ideas. This space is now the heart of the school. It is free of barriers and it is the venue through which I foster the development of a learning community that respects diverse learners, diverse populations, and all kinds of intelligence.

Getting ready for a new school building (Carson Graham Secondary was rebuilt and reopened in 2012) was the perfect opportunity to also redesign relationships, school services, instruction and assessment that put students first. This meant a dramatic cultural shift in practice and the way members of our learning community accessed resources—human, material and digital. My partners and I began this shift by building relationships and being supportive guides through change.

So what is my best practice? Creating welcoming spaces. Creating opportunities for teachers and learners to collaborate and connect with each other and with the resources they require for the teaching and learning at hand. And striving to realize tomorrow what is merely an idea today. Collaboratively, it can be done.

Love the Library!

# Resources

## Online Tools/Communities

BrainyQuote - http://www.brainyquote.com

Damien Kee – Technology in Education - http://www.damienkee.com/home/2011/8/20/domabot-classroom-robot-design.html

FIRST Lego League - http://www.firstlegoleague.org

FIRST Tech challenge - http://www.usfirst.org/roboticsprograms/ftc

Ground Breakers - http://lovesmithers.com/businesses/groundbreakers-collective

Lego Mindstorm Robotics - http://www.lego.com/en-us/mindstorms/?domainredir=mindstorms.lego.com

Q is for Question - http://qisforquestion.com

Skype - http://www.skype.com/en/

Team 2056 - http://2056.ca

TED - http://www.ted.com

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award - http://www.dukeofed.org/home

The Learning Coats Project - http://learningcoats.com

The Teaching Coats Project - http://teachingcoats.com

Twitter - http://twitter.com

VEX - http://www.vexrobotics.com/vex/competition/

VEX IQ - http://www.vexrobotics.com/vexiq/

YouTube - http://www.youtube.com

## Organizations

Centre for Child Honouring - http://childhonouring.com

Center for Courage & Renewal - http://www.couragerenewal.org

Marine Advanced Technology Education - http://www.marinetech.org

Ministère de la Famille du Québec - http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Pages/index.aspx (French only)

Physical and Health Education Canada - http://www.phecanada.ca/programs/physical-literacy/what-physical-literacy

Skills Canada - http://skillscompetencescanada.com/en/