

# aviso

The Magazine for Nova Scotia's Teaching Profession  
La revue de la profession enseignante en Nouvelle-Écosse

Fall 2016

## RE-HUMANIZING EDUCATION – ONE TEACHER AT A TIME





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# RADIO, TELEVISION and JOURNALISM

*Deborah A. McVeigh*



**I**magine being the first applicant to a new program offered by the then Kings Regional Vocational School in Kentville, successfully completing the one-year program, working in broadcasting for 19 years and then being hired to teach in the program—Radio and Television Arts! Dave Bannerman, Faculty member at Waterfront Campus, is the student, graduate, broadcaster, and employee of the NSCC who is sharing his experiences with us in this article.



**Q:** Dave, how did you get involved in teaching at the Waterfront Campus?

**A:** Previous to the design of the Waterfront campus, it was decided that some arts programs in outlying areas outside of metro would come together and be offered here in the city. Radio and Television Arts was one program affected by this and we moved from Kingstec Campus in 2007 to the Waterfront Campus in Dartmouth.

**Q:** What is the history of the Radio and Television Arts (RTA) program?

**A:** The RTA program started in Kentville as a one-year program in the fall of 1976. I was one of nine students accepted into that first one-year. Most of the class gained employment before or shortly after graduation. In September 2016, our 40th year of operation, the program name was changed from Radio and Television Arts to Radio, Television, Journalism (RTJ).

**Q:** What is the application process for an interested individual to follow?

**A:** Applicants come from a number of different sources. Some come directly from high school, several with undergraduate degrees or a few year's university experience, some are mature students who have been in the workforce and another source is a growing number of international students who arrive in Nova Scotia specifically for our program. All qualified applicants are interviewed in-person or virtually. They are interviewed in groups of four, which showcases the diverse strength of each individual and how the applicants interact with each other. We also find out why they want to take this program.

Once the application process is completed, the applications are approved on a rolling enrollment process and students are recommended for the program or they are asked to strengthen their application and reapply. Our program is known as an oversubscribed program, meaning that each year we have between 120-150 applicants, and we accept 30 students.

**Q:** How many students do you take in and how many graduate?

**A:** As stated above, we take in 30 successful applicants each year for the two-year program. There are usually 50-60 students on site in our media centre at any given time between first and second year. Our attrition rate is similar to all other broadcasting programs across the country and is generally around 20 per cent. Approximately 24-25 students will advance into their second year, with eighty percent of those graduating.

**Q:** What type of work is available to your graduates?

**A:** Many people assume that finding employment in this field is difficult. That is not the case with the explosion of the Internet and related digital technologies. Our program has morphed and evolved with these

changes in technology and the Internet. We provide training in the following three areas:

**Radio**—as on-air personalities, creative writers, producers, and in the area of promotions and marketing as well as even news.

**Video**—as camera shooters, video editors, producers, teleprompter operators, video switchers, writers and production assistants

**Journalism**—as reporters, news writers and new media web writers

10-20 percent of our graduates want to start their own business. Past graduates of our program share their experiences. A former graduate who is now the senior video producer at IGN (International Gaming Network) working out of San Francisco, California, was a motivational guest speaker in September.

**Q:** How many faculty are involved in delivering the program?

**A:** In total, there are seven of us delivering the program. Three are core subject teachers each with specialties in radio and digital audio production, video production and journalism. Four are related subjects or part-time faculty, involved in teaching digital tools, media writing, first year video production, and commercial writing. In total, there are seven of us delivering the program.

*“...a growing number of international students who arrive in Nova Scotia specifically for our program.”*

**Q:** Is this the only program of its type in Nova Scotia?

**A:** Yes. In fact, we are the only program in Atlantic Canada that offers all aspects of hands on radio, television and journalism.

**Q:** I noticed the first year of the Radio and Television Arts program is the same for all students and then in the second year, the students select their concentration. What are the concentrations? Do most students know when they enter what their concentration will be?

**A:** All first year students participate in courses covering all three disciplines – radio, television and journalism. They are required to achieve a passing grade in all courses before they are allowed to move into the second year. In the spring of their first year, they pick which field they would like to enter. The second year consists of their selection of a concentration which could be radio, video production or journalism. Approximately 30 per cent of incoming new students have a concentration in mind but of that 30 per cent, over half will change their minds as they are suddenly exposed to new skills and exhibit talents they weren't aware they possessed.

**Q:** What are the qualifications for teaching in this program?

**A:** Back in the 70s and 80s, an apprenticeship or a university diploma was necessary but today, a minimum of five years' actual industrial experience is a typical requirement. For example, when I joined NSCC, I had 19 years of industrial experience.

**Q:** I toured your facilities in the past year and was very impressed by the quality of your studios and the interest shown by the students. Please describe what makes your students so excited while studying.

**A:** The program is oversubscribed which means the best qualified students gain entry into RTJ and learn quickly how to balance the three disciplines—radio, television and journalism during year one. Most of them will feed off the energy of the program. They are

excited and inspired by what they see from the studios and their faculty.

The students also have the opportunity to engage with industry professionals who have reached the top of their field from Nova Scotia and all across Canada. Students have access to just under two million dollars' worth of state of the art video and audio equipment right here in Dartmouth, NS at the Waterfront Campus. Anyone who has not toured this building really needs to see it.

**Q:** The campus has its own radio station (CCKC). How does this motivate students in their learning?

**A:** Radio Station CCKC is our tribute to where the program originated. CCKC stands for *Community College Kingstec Campus*. Students have a chance to broadcast to the world in a state-of-the-art digital radio studio. Also because they're on air online, they are obtaining instant feedback from friends and family. Faculty routinely hear from potential employers who listen in as well. The television and journalism components are supported by a major local cable TV provider. This gives students the opportunity to broadcast weekly, on-campus-produced video content which is available on-demand for several months.

**Q:** Who would be eligible for Advanced Standing in this program?

**A:** Advanced standing is a possibility in the program but I don't recall anyone who has applied for it in my 23 years with NSCC. To achieve advanced standing, the applicant would need to have experience in industry and/or extensive volunteering experience. The RTJ program is constantly evolving; with the new technologies, processes and the changing demands of local employers, any first-year students who might qualify for advanced standing will almost always choose to start from the beginning with his/her new classmates.

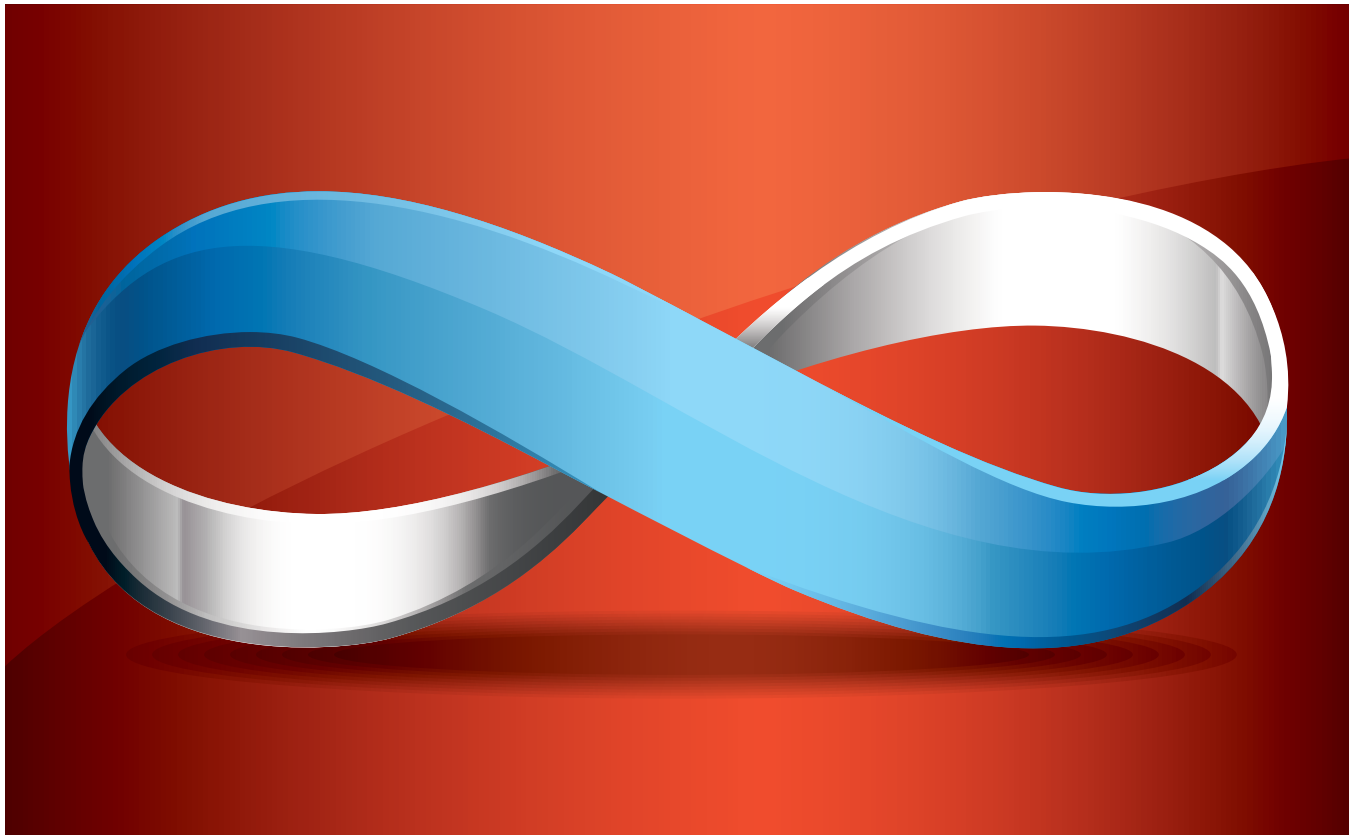
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**Deborah McVeigh is a Faculty Member at NSCC, Marconi Campus**



## Being Authentically Human

*David Ritchie*



**T**he difficult premise of this topic is to recognize that our current education systems are dehumanized. It is argued that all workplace organizations have fallen to less than human environments since the inception of the Industrial Revolution, the subsequent consolidations in the post industrial world and the onslaught of a digitally dominated 21st century. While this generalization can be successfully argued both positively and negatively, the very elements that made these circumstances emerge were based on their initiating revolutions and their subsequent triumphs, which have apparently fashioned our current world as dehumanized.

Are you a teacher or know someone who is a teacher? Can you relate to standing in front of a class of 35 students whose composition is made up of students with a grade 7 skill set, with 10 per cent of students unwilling to make any effort because they know regardless of their behaviour, work or total lack of work they will not be held back, a few students anxious to learn but requiring special attention, and a group of students striving to learn but finding the classroom pace too slow? If so, please read this article.

To be human means we are not gods, are not ani-

mals, and are not machines. Biologists would, I know, argue that we are in fact “animal” but the term is being used here as a label in its narrow non-zoological definition. As humans we share a collection of characteristics that disconnect us from being gods, animals, and machines. These characteristics include being mortal, fallible, kind, empathetic, humorous, understanding, honest, ambitious, cooperative, imaginative, courageous, self-controlled, tolerant, and caring. While this is only a brief list of the positive characteristics of being human, many would recognize that we all have fallen,





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in most cases, a considerable distance from these ideals.

I would maintain that none of us would contend that as people and teachers we are neither mortal nor fallible. When we look at some of the other presented characteristics the ground may not be as absolute or level. Teachers have long occupied an important and visible position in our communities. Often they, along with the local religious ministers and medical personnel, were the most educated and viewed as leaders. As such they often had an elevated status. Given the changing demographics, school consolidations, and growth of the educated classes, these distinctions have vanished in many areas. The other reality is that as schools and their feeder areas have grown the teachers often do not live in the geographic area where they work so their connection to the local community may be somewhat nebulous. As a result the teacher may not be seen as clearly local as the human who shops, socializes, entertains, or volunteers in the community. They may in fact be seen as work time visitors. This one step removal may in fact change the preconception people have of their humanity. Even so the teacher is still a vital human in the life of the students, the school, and the community.

Adults are often the natural and necessary role models who present acceptable behaviour and positive personal human characteristics to youth. We are also models for each other. Given the disastrous examples that are universally inundated on everyone by the media in all its forms, we need to promote acceptable patterns of humanity for behaviour in the homes, schools and lives. Since outside our own families it may only be in the schools that we really have an impact as teachers, it is vital we represent the very qualities that epitomize the very best that humans can be. In the past some teachers have resisted the charge that we must be positive example. Honesty and positivity are first on my list.

When we talk about humanity and the honesty and positivity of being human, it is essential that we closely examine the topic of at least three levels: the self (intra), with others (inter) and with our professional (ultra). It is important as a human being to be honest with our-

selves. The whole act of teaching is very complex and that complexity is exploding rather than levelling out. Often as teachers we are being asked to do the impossible in terms of expectations. The system will only begin to change, readjust, and improve if we begin to speak out strongly and clearly. Issues of classroom demography and climate are becoming increasingly critical. As a human we also owe it to ourselves and our fellow teachers to share insights and support. We need to insist on the logic and necessity of promoting human behaviours. When a system is failing it will only be corrected if the errors are recognized and changed. There should be easy pathways for those on the ground in the classrooms of this Province to be able to initiate discussions that will lead to needed corrective action and change.

Honesty is critical in terms of our own behaviour, our behaviour with others, and their behaviour with us. We cannot accept dishonesty from ourselves, from our supervisors, and from our communities. If we say we are doing well and we are not, we and the system suffers. Negativity and dishonesty are diseases that spread rapidly and quickly. Honesty and positivity as a pair promote the siblings empathy and cooperation.

Empathetic and cooperative behaviours are essential for being a successful human. In dealing with other teachers the need to understand that we each are different with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, education, and preparation. However, as professionals the cross-pollination created by cooperation is essential to our continued success and growth. When we stand alone we are very vulnerable. When we stand together and learn the reality changes dramatically and our likelihood of success increases geometrically. Not only is there strength in cooperative action, but there is also growth in understanding and in creating a positive maturing of the schools in the future. Teachers are the only ones uniquely equipped to recognize and make the adjustments required as the schools are adjusted to meet ever more substantial new demands. All too often there are outside entities that create changes that are not founded in the anecdotal experience or the practical circumstances of the actual classroom. Anyone

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and learn the reality  
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who has experience with statistics and the scientific method knows that there is a need to also have truths of anecdotal experience to complement the results. We also need to add kindness and self-control to our ingredients in our recipe as a human.

The first communal human kindness we can extend is our smile. Our human faces and eyes are well trained through their ability to smile to carry an extreme impressive quantity of information. The converse is also true. I am certain if you observe your world you will recognize the power of your smile. As a teacher we owe it to our students and fellow educators to present an appropriate welcoming and encouraging smile. The smiling and cheerful face and eyes create an immediate welcoming presentation that encourages positivity and humanity. I do not suggest the frozen faced smile but rather the sincere sunshine we can all generate. We need to have the self-control and kindness to provide the warmth and immediate motivation of the smile. We all have “Teacher Voice and Teacher Face” when we need to impose order but we all need to practice and use the Teacher Smile. We all know that the power of the welcoming eyes and face can alter a day, can pole-vault the receivers immediately into a better place and can actually boost the person who generates it. A smile is often considered to be a small thing but as a human trying to promote humanity is huge.

Humans are courageous, cooperative, and caring. I know we often see mankind at its worst but as humans we really do need to make an effort to combat pessimism. We must as members of the educational team be courageous, cooperative and caring. The bomb shelter mentality of a perceived danger ridden world and very complex organizations promotes fear, isolation and egocentrism. We must go out of our way to combat those three negative saprophytes. They darken and destroy of workplaces and the professional relationships we need to grow and prosper. We must be courageous and speak when class room cultures are demolished by overcrowding, too broad a skill range and unrealistic outcome expectations. We all know how to be great teachers and we also know often those goals are made impossible by

superimposed circumstance. It is important that we speak out when the impossible is being demanded. The speaking out cannot be strident but rather it must be measured, insistent, and professional.

We must also be cooperative. The old adages of weak links, failing cogs, and loose wheels are true. Teachers need to distinguish themselves as team players. There is a dramatic experiential interrelationship for a student with each classroom, each year, every teacher’s impact and the wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities that cumulates with the educated human being who eventually graduates. We must have a bird’s eye view of just where we fit in the whole scheme of things. Teachers must be confident that they understand and are cooperating in the total educational experience. As humans we must see the whole picture. To see the whole picture is to care about the total system as it impacts on our personal experience.

The very act of becoming teachers indicates an attitude of caring. We all have a post-secondary education that spans many years. I remember when I entered teaching I took a 50 per cent cut in salary. I had opted to change careers at 30-years-old. My job in Urban Planning meant that I had to live in cities in a very special

and isolating occupation. It was a serendipity that I ended up taking an education degree and landed in a classroom because I had never considered it as a possibility. However, I cannot imagine a more rewarding career experience. I enjoyed 38.5 wonderful and rewarding years. At the same time, it was incredible because I worked with an amazing collection of humans who cared. The shared caring was the icing on the cake after being rewarded by the extensive fellowship that encompasses the classroom, the schools, and the profession. For those who brand teachers as doing it for the money I say a very loud, “balderdash”. If those critics ever tried walking in any teacher’s shoes for a week they would know the difference.

Three other human qualities that teachers at their very best demonstrate are understanding, tolerance, and empathy. It is sometimes a stretch to understand all behaviour but it is essential to try. Each teacher deserves

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to be understood. By attempting to understand and by understanding we can collaborate to produce a better educational experience for our students and ourselves. We all are challenged at times to tolerate. Tolerance is the product of understanding. When we exercise our abilities to understand we open the doors to tolerance. We do not have to agree to be able to assist. Understanding and tolerance lead to all of us being able to empathetically accommodate and collaborate with our fellow teachers. The wonder is that by taking these paths we can progress both as individuals, help others to gain insight and collectively improve circumstances for the benefit of the whole school.

To be human we also are obliged to be imaginative, creative and ambitious. Because as humans we can imagine we need to exercise our imagination. To do otherwise would be to ignore our humanness. As humans we have an added susceptibility to weakness: the weakness of not trying to exercise our imagination. It is so easy to say we cannot even though the human reservoir of resources we share say we can. Creativity is a risk and we must all have the ambition to create. While it would be wonderful if we did, I do not intend to suggest we immediately stop everything and that we dance, draw, or write. I suggest rather a creativity in the broader human sense of the word in living the authentically human life of sharing, helping, and being a communal individual. Remember the power of the oxymoron, communal individual, to tie two opposites together to create a new idea. The power comes from individual amalgamating their individualities in the company of others to benefit all. Such is the aim of the teacher as the human in assisting in the re-humanization of the profession one teacher at a time. Ambitious but never the less essential.

Finally to be human means the capacity to be able

to express, enjoy and celebrate humour. When all else fails there is an immense delight in laughing at ourselves. Humour can expose serious deficiencies. If something has happened that has deflated the day, you find a way to see the funny side. Even if you cannot find the comic discover something else that you can share that that will make you and others enjoys a medicinal laugh.

For those of you wondering why I started with the graphic of the Möbius strip, it was because that image in my mind assists in understanding the relationship between teaching and being human. The relationship of being a human and being a teacher is like the surface of the Möbius strip if you follow the surface one appears to be both the inside and the outside of the other in a continuous strip.

In teaching we learn and by learning we teach. If we were to crawl along the length of the continuous Möbius strip made with a piece of paper and tape, it would return to its starting point having traversed the entire length of the strip (seemingly on both sides of the original paper) without ever crossing an edge. As an illusion it works for me in understanding teaching and humanization.

As is our very nature as a species all humans teach and learn either directly or indirectly. Thus it is totally consequential that we, as are teachers and directly involved, do everything we can to re-humanize the profession one teacher at a time. Providing models of being human is contagious. Make a check list of the positive characteristics listed in this article and evaluate how

you are doing. Remember failures are stairs leading to opportunities to improve toward success. Re-humanize one teacher at a time starting with you and then move on in the task with others.

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David Ritchie is a retired teacher from the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.



## Student Engagement

*Lindsay MacInnis*

**I**t is clear, from a teacher's perspective, disengagement is a growing problem in Nova Scotia high schools. Over the last decade students, parents, and education professionals have identified a number of factors, they believe, that lead to disengagement. The most recent inquiry was completed by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2014-2015. Even though their resulting Action Plan identifies some problems and subsequent solutions, it continues to be difficult to have a full understanding of disengagement. However, we do know that most students want to succeed both academically and socially. We are also certain that many students are faced with obstacles each day in merely attending school or having success when managing to attend. Poverty, mental health, and absenteeism are the first reasons to blame for disengagement, but are not limited to these three. Our goal as educators is to provide an education to students that gives an opportunity to achieve their potential; however, in reality our public school education is not meeting this goal, suggesting education must be revitalized. Technology has been presented as the solution to disengagement. However, we simply do not reach all students or provide proper programming to each individual, despite advancements in technology.

In the past decade high schools have desperately been seeking solutions to the disengagement of their students. Teachers feel the number of grade 12 students failing required courses could be preventable. Poor attendance continues to be the number one reason students are not succeeding. Technology has assisted in some of these cases, particularly if a student was absent due to illness or travelling. Teachers could communicate with the student via email, Google Classroom or Moodle, but the knowledge and understanding of the subject area was left up to the individual student to independently research and essentially learn the material outside of the classroom. Interestingly, the students succeeding via technology had strong parental support



and ready access to resources. Glaringly obvious, technology does not aid in our high risk population who have difficulty attending and engaging while at school; use of technology further delineates equity. The high risk student population often deals with poverty and limited parental support, as a result working independently is not a possibility in these situations. Identifying that high risk students often have limited support and have many obstacles to even attending school each morning is important and the first step. However, the solution to help these students becomes more problematic. Technology is an easy step in the right direction for the





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modern education system, but only for a certain group of students.

Supporting high risk students is challenging, especially within an outdated education system that requires kids to sit in an often rigid classroom environment for six hours a day. Simply informing educators to be more inclusive and respectful to all students, encouraging technology and collaboration does not change the climate or environment of school for high risk students. School is yet to break away from the traditional mould of educator as expert and students as passive listeners. Many of us believe education needs to be current, interesting, collaborative and inquiry based, yet for a variety of economic and political reasons change has only occurred in a small manner and generally with the use of technology. Expecting high risk students, who are often struggling for basic supports, to come to school or depend on technology for learning is not a logical solution. Technology as the mode of communication in learning does not assist the high risk learner.

As a result, temporary solutions have thankfully been put in place to deliver some opportunities for success. Although highly unpopular with some educators, the credit recovery policy allows some high risk students to succeed. Credit Recovery offers the disengaged student a second chance and place to successfully meet the outcomes of a previously failed course. The student is theoretically removed from a negative situation and given an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in a supportive environment. Often times, this opportunity encourages and motivates the student. The one on one programming is supportive and empathetic of the students' individual situation. The lost time during the student's disengagement can be made up during Credit Recovery to ensure all the

required outcomes are learned. The duration of the Credit Recovery generally takes several weeks in order for the outcomes to be met. The beauty of the Credit Recovery is that the previously met do not need to be re-assessed or taught. Credit Recovery allows a high risk student to overcome obstacles and experience success with school. The success and motivation to graduate encourages more positive behaviors in students who

otherwise would simply fail and drop out of high school. Credit Recovery is valuable in meeting the programming needs of some students.

Unfortunately, some educators believe Credit Recovery should be discontinued as it creates a no fail policy and caters to students who would generally drop out. However,

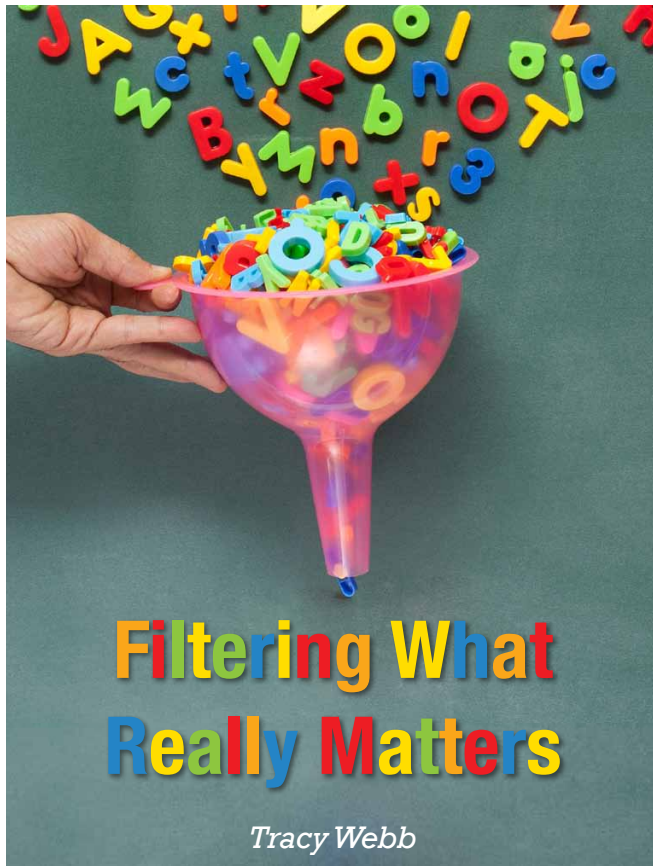
as an educator who has delivered Credit Recovery, I would beg to differ; if we are providing a successful method of reaching outcomes and decreasing drop out rate, should we be eliminating this programming option? High risk students have a right to education in a dignified and respectful manner. Each student also has a right to appropriate programming to meet their individual needs. Disengagement in education is not a students issue to solve. The issue is larger than the individual learner, and instead is an epidemic problem within one of the most valued institutions, Education. Society and all its stakeholders have to approach this problem and until then individual programs such as Credit Recovery should continue to fulfil the human right to education and combat student disengagement. Credit Recovery, when properly implemented, can reengage the student and enable them to achieve their success.

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Lindsay MacInnis we have no information about the author of this article.



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**W**e all have at least one memorable teacher in our lives, one who inspired, pushed, cared, and supported us as we made our journey through school. We also have the unique perspective of seeing the effects of the school system (positive and negative) from possibly three levels – as a student, perhaps as a parent of students, and as a teacher. In considering the multifaceted aspects of teaching – including issues of social justice, inclusiveness, accepting and supporting all learners – we have a tremendous responsibility, and sometimes we may not realize the power of our words and actions.

In a Masters course, I wrote a poem about teaching and social justice issues, and my wonderful Professor challenged me to write more. In one weekend, I wrote 27 poems – it was cathartic – I had no idea that all of these thoughts and feelings were waiting for such an opportunity to come to light! Most are based on personal events, others on situations I observed, whether as a student, parent or teacher. In sharing a few of them to demonstrate the impacts of teaching, I invite you to enter a place of reflection about your own experiences. Thinking about and acting upon how we teach through a filter of what is humane, just, and caring, will enrich everyone's experiences, long after the classroom door closes...



## *What I Learned in Grade One*

*YES!!!*

*It is Monday morning*

*And I bolt down my breakfast*

*And quickly pack up all my*

*Treasured tools for class –*

*My plaid Thermos and Batman lunchbox*

*My very neat notebook*

*Jack and Jill reader*

*My barely used Pink Pearl eraser*

*My box of crayons with colours*

*Beyond the rainbow*

*I exalt in the morning walk*

*Kicking through fallen oak and maple leaves*

*No longer green, but rich in reds and golden rusts*

*They crisp crunch crackle underfoot*

*“Colour this pumpkin picture – we will post them  
for your parents to see tonight...”*

*JOY!*

*I select my favourite colours and begin eagerly –*

*A brilliant sky blue for my pumpkin*

*With turquoise eyes and a lime green stem –*

*I think it is the most beautiful pumpkin ever!*

*My teacher collects and posts them all on the wall –*

*A testament to how well we colour between the lines.*

*Except mine...*

*Mine is not the right colour.*

*I am wrong.*

*I feel ashamed...*

# RE-HUMANIZING EDUCATION – ONE TEACHER AT A TIME



## **Progress Chart**

*I remember*

*the booklets and the worksheets*

*colour-coded*

*red, orange, yellow*

*brown, green, blue and purple*

*and I wanted*

*every colour on my chart*

*The S.R.A. program –*

*An innovation in education*

*that fostered competition*

*And some of us*

*raced to the finish*

*Satisfaction in every dot*

*carefully placed*

*on the row of our name*

*on the classroom wall display*

*plotting the progress*

*of our grade 3 reading skills*

*And the streaks of colour*

*proudly documented for all to see*

*The winners*

*and the*

*losers,*

*internalized*

*very*

*early*

*on...*

(Today, we have many supportive programs in place to assist our students, a greater understanding of how students learn, and better approaches to identify learning challenges...in the poem below I reflect on this individual who was not “identified” – not named...)

## **Grade 7 Attendance**

*He came to the new school alone*

*Tall, gaunt and gawky*

*With clothes that were too big*

*And usually smelling old*

*He never asked any questions*

*And rarely had a smile*

*His large hand clenched the pencil*

*And his finger would pin down each word he read*

*He fidgeted and squirmed uncomfortably*

*And would sometimes have an erection*

*Then the class would giggle nervously*

*And he'd be sent, mortified, out of the room*

*One day was his last*

*But we didn't know it at first*

*An empty seat in front of me*

*With a desk full of crumpled papers and books*

*That was forty years ago*

*And I still wonder from time to time*

*How different his life might have been*

*If his teachers had known his name.*

# RE-HUMANIZING EDUCATION – ONE TEACHER AT A TIME



## *It Didn't Work...*

*Conform Conform Conform*

*Damn it!*

*Is that what education is about?*

*Don't dare to be different, or else...*

*I trusted you with my precious precocious son  
in your grade 3 class*

*He was a co-operative creative nonconformist  
who loved to learn*

*You were teaching about the Aztecs  
and he was so intrigued by their culture  
that as he watched me sew one evening  
he asked me to make him a vest  
and he chose the fabric –  
an Aztec pattern of bright orange and blue*

*He was so excited and proud to wear it  
and “matched” it with his orange and brown camo pants  
and an orange plaid shirt...*

*Yes, it was a little hard on the eyes*

*But he didn't need to hear you  
tell another teacher on the playground  
“God his mother can't even dress him right –  
I'd never let any of my kids wear that!”*

*Who was he trying to protect,  
when he came home, deflated  
and told me what you said?*

*“It's okay mommy, my friends really liked my vest...”*

*But that vest was never worn again...*

## *Only Four Words*

(for Mrs. Joyce Merchant, Prince Andrew High School  
1975)

*Our class asked you one day – Why did you become an  
English teacher?*

*And you, who rarely deviated from your grade 10 topics  
yet taught us far beyond your books*

*paused thoughtfully, and looked at each one of our expectant  
faces.*

*You replied,*

*“When I was in school I had a Teacher who inspired me  
with her heart and soul,*

*showed me the possibilities in life, and how to overcome  
obstacles –*

*She had a profound impact on my life.”*

*“I wanted to be like her, and I imagined all of the souls I  
would save.”*

*She hesitated...*

*“But now, if I truly reach one or two students a year,*

*I feel that I have made a difference.”*

*Our class had a collective “hmmmm” or “huh – that's neat  
I guess”*

*and we went back to work.*

*I asked you to sign my autograph book*

*and read it when I got home, as tears flowed*

*Was I so worthy of your life-long gift?*

*Did you have any idea of how profoundly you affected me?*

*With only four words?*

*Of course you did. You passed me the baton...*



# RE-HUMANIZING EDUCATION – ONE TEACHER AT A TIME



## ***The Back Forties***

*You struggled so much  
to make sense of  
the code of chemistry  
came in for extra help  
asked me questions  
did all your work and failed.  
My calculator had no feelings  
and didn't know the significance  
of the buttons I pressed –  
It all added up to 46.*

*I felt awful for you  
but in my second year of teaching  
I had not yet realized  
the immense power I had to affect lives  
and that marks were not the Holy Grail  
I had assumed them to be.*

*You came to me in tears  
You needed that course to graduate  
to move on in your life  
and your chosen path did not require  
understanding chemistry.  
You didn't blame me though...*

*You returned the next year  
passed my course with  
a hard-earned 67%,  
and you thanked me  
for all of my help  
and encouragement*

*But I had learned far, far more from you...  
Thank you for teaching me.*

## ***Time Across Decades***

*Classroom is empty  
student chairs askew  
from the happy dash  
for the heavy door to  
hazy dog-day freedom*

*My classroom plants  
are safely home  
so my space seems  
so sterile and stark  
as I sit and reflect*

*Another year shared  
of my life with youth  
trying to inspire  
inform, encourage  
with belief in each one*

*What have they  
really learned from me?  
My hope is not just science  
but compassion, courage,  
and the creative grace  
to live true to their self*



# RE-HUMANIZING EDUCATION – ONE TEACHER AT A TIME



## *Treasures of Teaching*

*You came into my child's life  
And I was a bit worried  
For you were known to be strict  
But your standards and values  
Of being fair and committed  
To supporting the success of every student  
Were obvious the moment  
I walked into your class  
And during our Parent Teacher meeting  
You suggested ways of learning that  
Would assist my child  
Who had Asperger's and ADD  
And I knew in my heart  
That you were a true teacher  
In every sense of the word  
My child blossomed  
Over that year  
Discovering capabilities  
We only dreamed of  
How could we ever thank you  
But your huge smile  
As he crossed the stage  
Showed the same pure  
Pride and delight  
Mirrored on our faces  
From our overflowing hearts*

## *Opportunities*

*I am crying in the washroom  
With two of my friends  
Before I come to your class  
And you come in –  
You may ask, "Are you ok?"  
Of course I'll nod yes, and smile brightly  
so you'll believe me  
I know you are very busy  
And my friends will help me  
But if you stay,  
I may tell you that  
I can't get past feeling so depressed  
Or that a group of girls want to beat me up after school  
Or that my mom is really sick and I'm not home to help her  
Or that maybe I really need to hear some encouraging  
words,  
because life is overwhelming  
Sometimes my voice is too silent but you can hear me...*





# RE-HUMANIZING EDUCATION – ONE TEACHER AT A TIME



## ***Music Magic***

*Every morning you greet us with your smile*

*And “Smith – 1.3 in half notes...”*

*You guide us through a wonderful*

*Assortment of music and song*

*Often interspersed with funny stories*

*From your past*

*~ As our breathe transforms*

*Into magical harmonies*

*As we play ~*

*You and I both know*

*That music is so much more*

*Than just a collection of notes –*

*And that the process of*

*Performing together in a band*

*Is a lifelong treasure*

*Of memories shared*

*You have shown each individual student*

*How to set high expectations and standards...*

*Teaching, pushing, enlightening, and*

*Most of all, inspiring...*

*You are an exceptional teacher.*

*I thank you for your gifts,*

*Given so freely and beautifully*

*To all of us...*

## ***Insight***

*Challenge your assumptions*

*about who really sits before you -*

*What do you see?*

*What do you not see?*

*Are you aware of how you react*

*or change your tone of voice -*

*when a child struggles*

*Rebels*

*Reaches out*

*Retreats*

*Can't learn the way you teach*

*or what you're teaching,*

*get confused because you use “big” words?*

*Do you acknowledge and respect*

*those ‘not like you’?*

*Do you provide an open safe place,*

*give them your time,*

*let them know you really care?*

*Are you aware of your power?*

*Of what you may be really teaching?*

*By your actions? In your words?*

*Because only a few little words*

*can help a child soar*

*or shackle them in chains...*

# Creativity Honoring Humanity

*Dr. Steven Van Zoost*



**So there I was in St. John's, last spring, honouring creativity.** A three-tiered highly-decorated cake was being used as a visual model to explain a hierarchy of resources needed to foster creativity in our classrooms. I've been teaching graduate courses in education since 1999, and this was the first time that I've designed a course specifically about creative teaching pedagogies and practices. It was also the first time that a teacher had used a cake as a visual aid. We ate it too.

You've probably heard it time and time before: what we need is an educational system that promotes creativity in our students. In his popular TedTalk, Sir Ken Robinson defines creativity as having original ideas that have value. He argues that we need to prepare students to be wrong and that we need to value mistakes. Robinson calls for change in our school systems so that they nurture rather than undermine creativity. Few would argue with such a vision of education, but it begs the question, can creativity really be taught?

According to psychologist Ellis Paul Torrance, creativity involves four characteristics:

- 1 flexibility – you can change from one means of developing ideas to another

- 2 fluency – you can produce many different ideas about a concept
- 3 originality – you can produce novel, exceptional, or innovative ideas
- 4 elaboration – you can extend, build, or complete ideas

While any definition of creativity is contestable, I find these characteristics pragmatic for thinking about my classroom planning. It's helpful to divide the concept of creativity into smaller parts—flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration—when designing activities for my classroom. Rather than asking myself, “How can I encourage creativity in students’ responses?” I can ask myself “How can I encourage fluency in students’ re-



sponses?” or “How can I encourage originality in my students’ responses?” This seems much more manageable to me.

All of us can foster creativity in our students by planning classroom activities that invite students to demonstrate flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration in their thinking and in their products. When the tasks that we create endorse these skills, they become valued by students. In turn, creativity is valued in our classrooms. Sir Ken Robinson challenges us to honour creativity through systemic change. I challenge us to honour creativity through what we can do in our classroom—by focusing on our pedagogies and practices.

### Creative Pedagogies

I may have convinced you that creativity *can* be taught or at least fostered, but many argue that this is largely dependent on the learning environment. That’s why I am inspired by creative pedagogies that encourage students to be actively involved in their learning environment. I’m inspired by how the arts can be used to create inclusive classrooms and how place-based education can create community understandings. How inquiry-based projects can transform classrooms, how transdisciplinary education can transform schools, and how social action projects can transform students. These aren’t buzz-words that sound magnificent; they are pedagogical approaches that magnify the importance of students’ participatory role in designing our classroom programs. Here are six of my favourite “creative pedagogies”:

*Place-based education* uses the local community to achieve curriculum outcomes.

*Inquiry-based learning* uses students’ questions, problems, or issues to achieve curriculum outcomes.

*Social action projects* use students’ concerns about the world to achieve curriculum outcomes.

*Multidisciplinary learning* uses separate disciplines to examine a common theme or issue in order to achieve curriculum outcomes.

*Interdisciplinary learning* uses connections across disciplines to achieve curriculum outcomes.

*Transdisciplinary learning* dissolves discipline-based boundaries to create new approaches to achieve curriculum outcomes.

Every year, I create space in a course to explore creative pedagogies based on my students’ interests. I can never predict where such paths will lead and, I admit, it takes some courage to get to know and follow the interests of students. Such pedagogical stances have led us into place-based education and poetry connections where my class, after visiting communities and their renowned poets, created Wikipedia entries for the community of

Three Mile Plains (and poet Dr. George Elliot Clarke) as well as the community of Stanley (and poet Alden Nowlan). Another year, an inquiry-based project about 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communities resulted in a class trip to a First Nations community in northern Alberta in the dead of winter, the creation of a documentary, and the publication of an anthology of essays. Faithful readers may recall me describing

*“When the tasks that we create endorse these skills, they become valued by students.”*

a social action project called “realfriends: stop cliquing, start connecting,” initiated by a class who wanted to break down the social barriers in our high school. Last year, in an interdisciplinary fashion, my class wrote and performed choral poetry to accompany the music performed at the school’s year-end concert. These experiences don’t only shape students; they shape how I see myself as an educator and how I can realize educational goals through creative pedagogical stances.





### Creative Practices

Pedagogies can be understood as broad approaches to designing a classroom program, whereas I use the term “practices” to refer to the day-to-day means in which we structure learning experiences. As teachers, we have to be creative in our day-to-day practices: we have to determine how to organize learning for a variety of learner needs, what resources are most suitable for those diverse needs, and offer a range of options for students to demonstrate the required knowledge and skills. In this light, teaching is an art. Let me paint you a picture of some of the challenges we face in developing creative practices. Warning: it isn’t pretty.

In our high school of 930 students, we have a portable cart with 30 Chrome Books. We lost our computer labs this year as we welcomed a new grade level to our school and the computer labs were changed into classrooms. While we have more students and teachers in the building, we don’t have a feasible way for all students in one class to access a digital device or computer. I know that access to technology looks different in every school but I offer this description to emphasize how teachers have to be creative in figuring out how to embrace Google Classroom and other digital experiences when resources are limited. (We are, by the way, expected to receive two more carts of 30 Chrome Books later this semester, which will raise the access ratio to one Chrome Book per ten students in the school). Creativity, for teachers, is constantly being negotiated with what resources are available to students. Creativity, in our school’s situation, is not only about what activities to design in our Google Classrooms that will meet the

needs and interests of our students; it’s also about how to creatively divide access time of 30 Chrome Books with our 930 students.

What I am about to say next, I mean – but I am already apologizing in my head for writing this to you.

“*The most important resource in my classroom is my students. I have to believe this.*”

*The most important resource in my classroom is my students.* I have to believe this. Our classroom resources are often beyond our control. However, the opportunities for students to take up creative thinking are limitless. (Insert groan here). I’m not suggesting that material resources are not important. After all, it’s difficult to take an online course without a computer. What I’m signaling is that regardless of the resources

available to us, we need to be mindful of asking students to show flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration. Classroom practices that provide opportunities for students to be flexible and innovative tend to be more engaging for students.

If we believe Sir Ken Robinson that creativity is the hope of our future, then we need to make sure that students learn to value creativity. They need to see creativity not as something limited to an activity in art class or improvisation in drama class. They need to see creativity in all aspects of their education. We can start by making sure that students see how we, as educators, value creativity through our pedagogies and practices. And that, my dear colleagues, as we know, is not always a piece of cake.

---

**Dr. Steven Van Zoost teaches for Nova Scotia Virtual School and Avon View High School in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.**

# Back Page

Brian Forbes



**I**n Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo* we read the following: "A new governor [of the prison in which Dantes is being held] arrived; it would have been too tedious to acquire the names of the prisoners; he learned their numbers instead. This horrible place contained fifty cells; their inhabitants were designated by the numbers of their cell, and the unhappy young man was no longer called Edmond Dantes – he was now number 34." Later on, as Dantes makes contact with a fellow prisoner through the walls, the following exchange takes place: "Tell me at least who you are" "I am – I am No. 27".

Teachers and students are human. Bureaucracies are composed of humans, but they themselves are neither human nor humane. The whole *modus operandi* of a bureaucracy is to quantify and objectify, to standardize and dehumanize. That is not (necessarily) the result of ill intent. It is just the inevitable tendency of the bureaucratic approach to reality.

What is more quintessentially human than the encounter between learner and teacher? Throughout the ages it has been the means of cultural transmission, intellectual advancement, society building. Most importantly, it is one of the most fertile arenas for individual growth across the whole spectrum of human "being". It is the means by which outstanding minds and characters are formed – or not. In education the key factor is the "human touch".

Learning thrives in an environment where very human qualities such as curiosity, excitement, wonder, joy and friendship are valued and fostered. It is a qualitative experience. Bureaucracy, on the other hand, lives on numerical values and quantitative measurements. Learning is devoted to shaping and giving a distinctive character to the individual. Its attention is drawn most easily to the unique, the unusual, the mysterious, the inspiring, and the awesome. Bureaucracy attempts to control, mold and press the mass into uniformity. It concentrates its energies on standards, regularities, averages, aggregates, means and computations.

So what happens when these seemingly antithetical enterprises – education and bureaucracy get tangled up together?

I would suggest that bureaucracy ineluctably

interposes itself between teacher and learner, and the greater the extent to which it succeeds in doing so, the less human – and humane – education becomes.

Standardized testing, data collection, and data entry are Exhibit A in my argument that, in at least some aspects, the public education system has become excessively driven by bureaucracy. Over and over again I hear that teachers are feeling swamped by ever increasing demands for standardized testing, and plans and strategies for generating higher scores. Hours are consumed on data collection and entry. Too much time is spent in the time-wasting, mind-deadening and sometimes computer-crashing process of wrestling with clunky and quirky programs, entering (sometimes redundantly) endless data and reports, sent to who knows whom for who knows what purpose.

This, among all the teacher stories I hear, is the most frequently repeated. "This is not what I signed up for. I love teaching, I love my students. I want face time with them, in the classroom. I don't see any of this as making any genuine contribution to my students' learning, or helping me in any way to become a better teacher, or my students to become better learners. I feel as if my students and I are becoming ciphers in a system, abstractions in someone else's plan."

The effects of increasing bureaucratization of education and the cries for help need to be alleviated, so our students and teachers do not become mere numerals.

---

Brian Forbes is a retired teacher and former president of the NSTU.





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