

# aviso



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

Winter 2018



nourishing  
the  
whole self



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# Organizational Learning at NSCC

Deborah A. McVeigh

**C**heryl Burgess is the Director of Organizational Learning for the Nova Scotia Community College. Many changes have taken place in her department recently and Cheryl describes some of them to us in this article.

**Q: What is Organizational Learning and what does it encompass?**

**A:** As a learning-centered organization that provides opportunities for every NSCC employee to be a lifelong learner, NSCC focuses on building employee learning and promoting employee training and development. The Organizational Learning Department offers the following credentialed programs:

- Leadership Programs for new and seasoned Managers
- Adult Education Programs for new Faculty and Professional Support Staff
- Operational Excellence Programs for Operational Support employees.

Organizational Learning also offers over 50 professional development workshops, Learning Leaves and Learning College Portfolio Programs for Faculty, Professional Support and Operational Support employees. We also administer tuition reimbursement, Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), and Leave for Change. Annual conferences are available to our employees including the Support Staff Learning Conference, the Facilities Support Staff conference and we also provide support to the Faculty and Professional Support conference.

As you can see, we are a very busy department.

**Q: I'm interested in the Community College Education Diploma Program (CCEDP) component. Could you please describe the changes that recently took place?**

**A:** CCEDP had a complete program review and re-

newal in 2016-17. Changes to the curriculum were made to integrate Universal Design for Learning principles, include more authentic evaluation, incorporate work integrated learning, and increase program completion flexibility by offering all courses using a blended approach to delivery.

**Q: I believe most of Organizational courses are offered online. Do you find this works well with your students?**

**A:** We have a variety of delivery methods including face-to-face, blended using D2L, Skype, etc., as well as some courses completely online. The choice works well. The blended format supports different learning styles and convenience for learner schedules.

**Q: CCEDP is divided into two streams. Please describe what each stream involves.**

**A:** The two streams are Teaching and Learning and Student Development.

The Teaching and Learning stream focuses on the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful as a faculty member, primarily in a new teaching role. Professional Support employees such as Curriculum Consultants also benefit by participating in this stream in their roles supporting teaching and learning.

The Student Development stream focuses on the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to meet the needs of students for the Student Services Profession. The program is focused on supporting students in and out of the classroom using evidence-based decision making.

*As a learning-centered organization that provides opportunities for every NSCC employee to be a lifelong learner.*

**Q:** Please describe the course requirements for completion of CCEDP

**A:** CCEDP is 360 hours and completed over a two-year period on a part-time basis. Learners must complete eight required courses and have a choice of one elective.

**Q:** How many hours are required in each course?

**A:** Most courses are 30 hours in length. In the CCEDP, there is one required course that is 90 hours in the first year and the capstone course, **Building Portfolio Through Applied Practice**, in the second year which is 60 hours in duration.

**Q:** Do new Faculty and Professional Support employees find it challenging to finish these requirements in two years?

**A:** With the support of managers, mentors, peers, program facilitators, and a community of learners, new faculty and professional support employees usually complete the program in two years. The majority of the courses are offered during non-teaching college periods such as March Break, spring semester and summer months. The program also uses a blended delivery for courses to allow for flexibility in completing the work.

**Q:** The foundation of this program used to be three summers of five weeks duration at the Truro Campus. Why was it streamlined and reduced over the years?

**A:** Organizational Learning sought feedback from stakeholders across the College and has done in-depth research on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for success in the first two years at NSCC. Extensive consultation was completed with students, faculty, graduates, faculty of the program, and the executive of the College. Canadian and American colleges were surveyed to identify best practices and 21st Century competencies for Teaching and Learning. We are confident that CCEDP is meeting this need with the current program structure.

**Q:** What is the name of the program for managers?

**A:** The new program is called Leadership Development. The program is designed to meet the professional development needs of College Managers and Academic Chairs. The program focuses on developing skills and knowledge related to change, communication, accountability, and alignment.

**Q:** What kind of feedback do you obtain from your graduates?

**A:** All courses are evaluated during the midterm and after the face-to-face and final evaluation. The evaluations are conducted by Institutional Research. We receive feedback on what is working well, what needs improvement, and the learning that has taken place.

**Q:** Which courses seem to be the most popular? Most beneficial?

**A:** Teaching and Learning courses that directly relate to their practice and allow them to practice their skills, such as Facilitating Learning seem to receive the most positive feedback.

**Q:** Are any courses offered on site and if so, where do you stay?

**A:** During the summer, CCEDP course are offered at the Truro Campus. Following College travel policies, those employees eligible are hosted at the Truro Campus Residence. Courses during the academic year may be offered at a NSCC campus across the province. Following College travel policies, accommodation at a local hotel is arranged for eligible employees.

**Q:** Do students obtain credits for these courses and are they transferable as university credits?

**A:** All courses in CCEDP, Operational Support and Leadership programs are credit courses. We are currently working on articulation opportunities with other post-secondary institutions to provide pathways to other credentials for students.

*“NSCC focuses on building employee learning and promoting employee training and development.”*

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Deborah McVeigh is a Faculty member at NSCC, Marconi Campus

# Improving School Climate through Disability Awareness Programs

**R**ecent research has demonstrated the importance of positive school climate for improving behavioural, academic and mental health outcomes for students<sup>1</sup>. Positive school climate increases student learning and achievement, reduces high school dropout rates and prevents bullying<sup>2</sup>. It is also effective in risk prevention, learning<sup>3</sup> and motivation to learn<sup>4</sup>. Clearly, school climate matters.

So what is this magical ‘thing’ we call positive school climate? A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions<sup>5</sup>. It is the recognition that education goes beyond the function of curriculum to include social, moral, ethical and prosocial behaviour.

Sometimes, however, the challenge is not defining a positive school climate or agreeing that it is important, but finding the time and resources to make it a priority.

The process for developing positive school climate is ongoing. It involves making positive relationships a priority, providing students with opportunities to develop and practice empathy, compassion and conflict resolution skills, and to take a leadership role<sup>6</sup>.

Not-for-profit educational resources, such as the Rick Hansen School Program, provide educators with a range of practical teaching tools that support the development of a positive school climate.

Two key aspects of the Rick Hansen School Program support the development of a positive school climate:

- **Disability awareness.** Disability awareness programs promote key characteristics of a positive school climate, such as equity, fairness, caring and sensitivity. They dispel myths and improve knowledge, reduce bullying<sup>7</sup> and create more favorable attitudes towards people with disabilities<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, the impact of disability awareness programs goes beyond people with disabilities. By supporting acceptance of diversity, respect and understanding of differences, disability awareness

programs encourage positive interactions among all students.

- **Encouraging students to create positive change.** Students learn to set goals, support others, and take leadership. Students develop and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to become informed, responsible citizens and improve schools and communities through social action projects.

Current research shows that a positive climate that emphasizes high expectations for caring relationships and respectful interactions plays a key role in effective schools and academic success. Investing time and effort in creating positive school climates leads to positive outcomes for all students and school communities. Programs such as the Rick Hansen School Program are an excellent way to support a positive school climate by promoting understanding of disabilities, differences and inclusion, and encouraging students to become responsible citizens, creating positive outcomes for all.

*The Rick Hansen School Program is a comprehensive set of free resources for K-12 educators to increase disability awareness, accessibility and inclusion and empower young people to make a difference. 99% of teachers and administrators who responded to a recent survey reported that the Program has made a positive difference in their school. Program materials align with provincial curriculum expectations. Materials are available online at [www.rickhansen.com/schools](http://www.rickhansen.com/schools).*

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**Karen Morrison is Curriculum Developer, Rick Hansen School Program**

<sup>1</sup> Thapa et al., 2012, Cohen & Geier, 2010, Gregory et. al., 2010, Lee et al., 2011

<sup>2</sup> National School Climate Center <http://www.schoolclimate.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Najaka, et.,al., 2002

<sup>4</sup> Eccles, et al., 1993, Goodenow and Crady 1997

<sup>5</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, “Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour” (December 5, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> Weissbourd, Bouffard and Jones, 2013

<sup>7</sup> Milson, 2006

<sup>8</sup> Ison, et. al. 2010; Moore & Nettelbeck, 2013; Rillotta & Nettlebeck, 2007





## They don't lick it off the grass!

*Wade Van Snick*

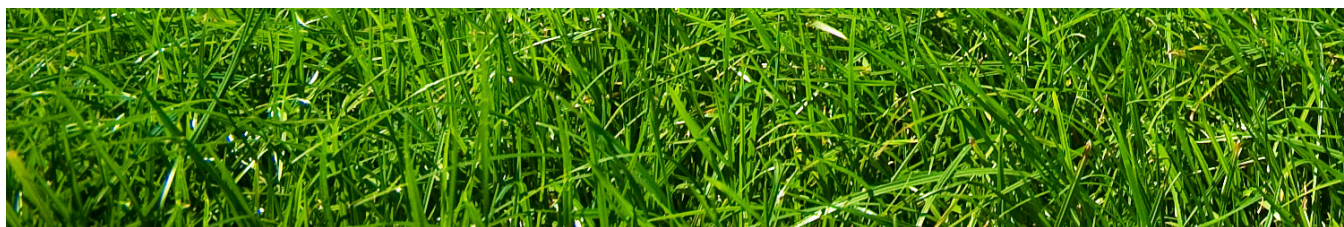
**W**ith twenty-seven years of teaching, from the very beginning my response to the perennial comment, “I wouldn’t want to be teaching kids these days!” has always been the same, “Kids are great! Considering all things, they are fun to be around and surprisingly well-adjusted.” Although I still believe this, I have found that more and more, my conviction is not quite what it used to be. Admittedly, these are different times and the lives of kids have changed. As a high school Guidance Counsellor for the past 17 years, not having my own classroom for the past 10 years, my experience and perspective has changed as well. The many personal, social, emotional, academic, and career related problems adolescents face has steadily increased. I feel, however, the current prevalence and continued increase of adolescent mental health problems has more to do with “us” than it does them.

Twenty-eight years ago, while in my B.Ed. program, one of my professors said the following to our class prior to the first teaching practicum: “At your first parent-teacher interviews, you will realize that kids don’t lick that stuff off the grass.” A crude visual indeed, but I have to admit that I have taken many opportunities over the years, as many of my colleagues can attest, to regale and share this notion with a great deal of levity. There is greater wisdom, however, in this idea than mere humour. The problems faced by many adolescents today are not all of their own making; nor are they licking all of this stuff off the grass. The way they dress, speak, dance, listen to music, socialize, relate to each other, and relate to adults, combined with their ever-diminishing self-esteem and their ever-growing stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health related problems and disorders are not all self-created problems. Therefore, it is also not within their complete control to solve. Teaching them about mental health problems or providing them the same oft-touted self-care tools used by adults, is not sufficient.

As School Counsellors, helping students with their self-care is vital to our work. Helping them to find meaning in their personal experience by providing them the opportunity to think about their own actions and thoughts, making them more: mindful, patient, resilient,

grateful, and in-the-moment, making them less: self-focused and future-focused. We encourage them to practice journaling, do progressive muscle relaxation, learn ways to manage their emotions, eat a healthier diet, exercise more, give back to others, and of course, breathe. These practices and approaches can have an immediate positive impact as well as the potential to pay great dividends over the course of their lives. The continual external demands and messages challenge their efficacy and diminish their effectiveness, especially during the challenging times of adolescence. Although self-care is important, it doesn’t fundamentally interrupt or even challenge the larger societal or systemic issues. And so, the conversation needs to expand from self-care to system-care, from individuals to collectives, from independent to interdependent. This is a different kind of advocacy and mindset, but one that I believe holds the greatest promise.

The increased incidents of adolescent mental health problems including: stress, anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, OCD, ADD, ADHD, etc., has more to do with conditions created by systems within society rather than anything individual adolescents are doing. Yet, time and time again, our attempts to help them seem limited to finding new ways to inform them, educate them, treat or counsel them, or even, blame them. They







# nourishing the whole self

are adolescents – they are not adults – by extension we owe them a duty of care that extends beyond helping them to help themselves. Not just the things we say, but the tried and true approaches we use like setting limits, providing structure and discipline, and being positive role-models, are the things that will help their growth and development. To do any less is to abdicate our responsibility and thereby rob them of their adolescence, and quite possibly, their future.

We need to examine the systems surrounding children, peel back the layers of each, and get at the root causes of the growing incidents of mental health problems. We cannot hide what we find, diminish its impact, or choose to ignore it because it is inconvenient or difficult to solve. Our current approach of talking about what it looks like and how to recognize it, while creating new programs aimed at reducing stigma and engaging youth in conversation and advocacy, does not address the larger systemic issues keeping adolescents stuck in a continuous negative loop of poor mental health.

## *Parenting*

In many ways, parenting methods are fostering the growth of an insecure generation. Be it from: poverty, absence of parenting, “helicopter” or “snowplow” parenting, permissive parenting, or parents struggling to maintain their own well-being, the role of parent as provider, role-model, and nurturer requires greater attention and the support of other systems. Insecurity in adolescents is not nourishing and can lead to poor mental health.

## *Technology*

Advancements in technology have provided more ineffective and harmful coping mechanisms for our youth. Dopamine driven technologies, popular in the lives of nearly every adolescent, have hijacked the developing adolescent brain and created addiction in some instances. This ever-present need for more of the reward-seeking chemical alters the well-being of some individuals. Instant everything leads to greater impatience when it’s

no long instant. From the food they eat to the way they interact, communicate, and seek entertainment, they want everything resolved immediately. Impatience and addiction in adolescents are not nourishing and can lead to poor mental health.

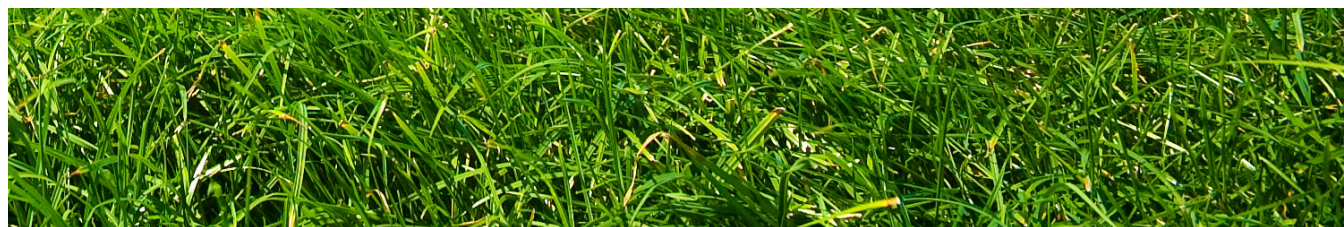
## *Environment*

Just a generation or two ago adolescents could be found in: churches, service clubs, recreational and community programs. Today, participation is nearly nonexistent. These environments were places adolescents had the opportunity to get certain basic needs met, develop a sense of belonging, participate and contribute, give back to others, and to work towards their natural best. Other systems including business, the workplace, education, and regrettably justice, have never been designed or equipped to foster these same positive opportunities. These systems have evolved in ways that perpetuate the disconnect, hindering the attainment of the core needs. Environments in which adolescents find themselves can either nourish or harm; thereby either support positively or contribute negatively to their mental health.

“They don’t lick that stuff off the grass” – they learn it from “us.” And yes, they are great and fun to be around. They are wonderful, smart, idealistic, ambitious, hard-working, good people. But maybe, just maybe, they are being dealt a bad hand that they are struggling to play. They are simply not as well-adjusted as adolescents were twenty-seven years ago. If this is an entire generation struggling, maybe it is not them! They are not that difficult to understand. They are human beings, just like the rest of us, trying to find their way. But the help they deserve needs to look very different from the help we’ve been offering. And just for the record, it is no good pointing fingers or placing blame, only a hope that there is a better way, where the grass is greener and the future brighter for all.

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Wade Van Snick is a School Counsellor, Amherst Regional High School





## Lessons from the Dance Floor

### An argument for arts in education

*Sara MacInnes*

**W**hile most would recognize the validity of fine arts in public education, it is still often one of the first places for budget cuts. We have heard that fine arts improve academic achievement while working on a variety of other skills such as creativity (a valuable tool in the workplace), yet schools, parents, and adolescents alike still place more emphasis on English, Math, and Science. Students make comments that they “don’t have room in their schedule” to take Music, Art, Drama, or Dance because they feel their time is better served learning Chemistry, Biology, Physics, and Calculus. While STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education is important for the progression of society, I would argue that the innovation needed for advancements in these fields would be significantly enhanced by more education in fine arts.

The students who make room for fine arts in their schedule recognize and value the enriched experiences the arts have to offer. At the end of Dance 11, my students write a reflection on the progress they’ve made in Dance throughout the semester. They tell me what they feel they’ve learned and how they’ve overcome fears and obstacles along the way. Time and time again, stu-

dents in my Dance class tell me how they have learned valuable skills which are transferable to all other areas of their life; skills in areas like: presentation, leadership, team-work, self-expression, and problem-solving. It also increases their creativity and learning to take risks for personal growth.

One of the main themes stated by students is the





# nourishing the whole self

feeling that they have increased their confidence, particularly in presenting in front of a crowd: “Dance class brought me out of my shell... Before dance class, I was very nervous in front of a class when presenting but after this course I really do feel more confident going up even when I mess up I still don’t get nervous and I keep going,” says Mojan, age 16. Many students also expressed feeling more confident in their bodies, something which is very difficult for adolescents, particularly females: “If you would like to achieve self-confidence then this is definitely the class to be in. In the beginning I did not want to be in this class and I did everything I could to get out but now I love dance and do not regret it. My confidence level has increased so much because of dance. Presenting has become easier because if I can dance in front of people, talking is simple. I’m so thankful for dance because without it I don’t think I could ever be this confident with myself or my body,” says Tamanna, age 16.

With more confidence comes an increased ability to contribute and take on a leadership role, serving to enhance students’ leadership skills both inside and outside of the classroom: “At the beginning of the semester I would normally let others take the lead. But since then I became more confident and able to take on a leadership role. I found myself being the leader more often when choreographing dances. As I became comfortable with this role, I started to take those leadership skills to other aspects of my life, like in baseball,” says Skylar, age 16. Dance 11 students don’t only learn to “take the lead”, but also learn how to work within a group and collaborate with others: “I will take away how to dance together instead of just [individually]. Dancing with someone is extremely different from dancing in a group. Working with a partner means you have to work together, you’re one unit, a team,” Skylar adds.

As an adolescent, it can be difficult to express yourself, particularly when you are still discovering who you are and being an individual is not always accepted. Dance provides a safe place for students to experiment, find themselves, and share their emotions with others: “Self-expression was a huge thing for me that I learned a lot about in this course... it was really cool to learn about how to communicate emotions through dance.” Sara, age 16. Many students enjoy dance as a healthy release and a way to let go: “At the beginning of the year, I went along with everyone’s dance and fell in the crowd. As the semes-

ter started to progress, I put my input and ideas forward a lot more. I found expressing yourself through dance was a great way to either release stress or cheer yourself up. Expressing yourself through dance was a great way to get stuff out without having a fit. I think this is important to get yourself out there and express yourself since high school is stressful,” says Kayley, age 16.

Problem-solving skills are not only learned in math and science but in solving every-day problems and overcoming challenges along the way: “At the beginning of the term I found it hard to solve even small choreographic challenges but after facing them almost every assignment, I’m a lot better at solving problems now. This is a good skill for everyday life as there are so many challenges that I have to face on a regular basis. I’m grateful for all this class has taught me,” says Brooke, age 16. Taking risks and facing fears is another way to overcome challenges. Students felt a sense of accomplishment every time they faced their fears and presented a piece, exposing a part of their soul, to an audience: “I learned that each dance has an individual take and challenge to it... I took away that I have to take risks in class and outside of class. You can’t change challenges in your life... Later in life, whenever there is an opportunity for risk, I will remember to take [it] because it is an amazing feeling; walking off stage knowing you just faced a fear,” says Savannah, age 16.

I could speak for days on the benefits of learning Dance and other fine arts in public education. I love the fact that students at my school have the opportunity to take Dance 11 as well as other fine arts like visual art, music, and drama. The opportunity to develop a different side of themselves and experience personal growth. I would love to see more students take advantage of these courses within their high school careers. The arts should be as valued and as wide-spread as “core” subjects, given that they offer just as many, if not more, learning opportunities for students. If your child has the option, encourage them to take advantage of fine arts courses; you never know, they may discover an untapped talent! And encourage the decision-makers in your area to support fine arts in education – it will make for more confident, grounded and innovative adults in the future.

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**Sara MacInnes teaches Dance 11 at Charles P. Allen High School.**





# Restoring the human element in education — a creative pedagogy perspective.

*Paul Syme MA*

**P**lacing no focus on teacher hardships or difficult experiences, with the profession under fire, teachers seek lessons towards restoring the human element in education. If we can imagine this from the point of view of a marginalized student, it would be reasonable to assume that they are drawn to teachers who light the way to a hopeful future rather than those who, in any way, reinforce the anguish they experience. This highlights the higher purpose of teachers. Effective teachers aspire to show students that a teacher relentlessly seeks to make a difference in their classroom and school communities. Teachers do not enter the profession to be shaped by data collection in the service of an outcomes based system — a technocratic box checker who is busy covering curriculum outcomes to an otherwise dutiful yet disengaged and distracted audience. Students who experience the data collection version of a teacher do not appreciate nor aspire to our noble profession. Assuming no teacher wants to be that person either, it's timely to remember the qualities that make us the high impact leaders that can inspire a bright future for our students, our communities, and our profession.

Teachers are, by nature, leaders. The more obvious transferable skills include such qualities as enhanced interpersonal, management, communication (i.e. writing and public speaking), evaluation, research, planning, technical, and clerical skills. Though these are important, having the capacity to build relationships and to juggle the components of a highly complex environment are among the most significant indicators of successful teachers and leaders. Educators are leaders who cultivate a drive in students to produce their finest work. They promote student agency and pride by affirming a sense of the world and providing a catalyst for their students to commune with the perspective and contributions of others. These teachers help guide students to realize their dreams and the futures they have yet to imagine. The idealism here is intentional as it offers a lens along a trajectory towards what is possible.

To this end, the intersections of creative pedagogy and Wayne Constantineau & Eric McLuhan's Human Equation (2010) offer meaningful lessons. Where creativity informs how we can respond to the dynamics of classrooms and workspaces comprised of multiplicities in personalities, cultural contexts, and abilities, the Human Equation reminds us that teachers are leaders, not pushers of outcomes when they fashion their practice among Cultivating, Contemplating, Conducting, and Transforming.



## Creative Pedagogy

Creative pedagogy promotes divergent thinking-processes and the production of novel ideas or forms — activities that flourish in sustained safe, secure, and supportive environments. Providing these conditions in classrooms moves to obsolesce distinctions between teachers and leaders. Here, teachers, students, and administrators operate with gradients of autonomy where each play a role to aid student development. Creative teachers take the risk to avoid using duress and authority to manage students in classes where the hierarchy, if not inverted, is mostly flattened. Students negotiate with encouraging teachers to guide paths of inquiry. Administrators provide the resources that enable these endeavours. As most of us teachers who are from a modernist tradition grow anxious in the face of collapsing silos and hierarchies, feeling insecure about surrendering authority to student interests and drive, creative pedagogy offers routes past such ontological insecurities.

The unknown does not need to breed anxiety, rather it leads to opportunity. Brain research by Kounios and Beeman (2009) revealed that those “aha” moments of creative insights we experience often come after periods of frustration. They observed that expressions of frustration extend from failing to solve problems in the conscious mind through memory and deductive reasoning. The brain then, in a future relaxed state, unconsciously seeks out connections among disparate experiences and memories until, in a burst of gamma waves (the most powerful in the brain), forms a new awareness. To the creative person, therefore, facing the unknown is rarely undone by stressful moments because they perceive frustration as an indicator of forthcoming insights and novel beauty. It’s like roadways. We’re frustrated when they’re under construction, but new directions and easier access become longer term gains.

Like the artist, through empathy and flexibility, we learn to face newness and difference in ideas, cultures, behaviours, and technologies through openness and improvisation. When confronted with unknown phenomenon or the unique individual, creative leaders adapt by mimicking their brain’s process towards arriving at ‘aha’ moments — creatively juxtaposing their understanding of pre-existing archetypes with their experiences to propose new solutions or avenues to accommodation. Aware that how something is said or the space in which a task is performed will impact learning experience and outcomes, creative pedagogues shape the learning environment to support student led content. In practice, teachers reach out for student interests and coach them to make connections with curricular priorities and from these intersections build new opportunities.

A creative pedagogue strives for student engagement and productivity through creative inquiry not duress. Daniel Pink (2009) shares how humans are driven by the situations that provide for autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman (*Prosperity Now*, 2009) remarked that the increased tension resulting from arguing, promising, and threatening fail to induce positive change. Alternatively, removing barriers eases tension which encourages behavioural change. Kounios and Beeman (2009) observed that creative insight happens in the prepared mind, that is to say in relaxed, and more so in content or happy states. Advising us to find motivation through a state of flow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi directs us to pursue: “Joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life” (preface, 1990). When in a state of flow, the participant operates at full capacity, dynamically emerged in their activity. The fully engaged painter, musician, athlete, etc. — who, while at their peak of ability, reaches beyond what they know they can do towards a higher level of performance, heightens their happiness. This kind of happiness challenges us to grow, as opposed to the moments of happiness we find in our more sinful indulgences.

Engaging students to welcome the struggles that lead to the highest levels of the New Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 202), creativity requires a space where everyone feels valued. Creative pedagogy promotes inclusive bi-cultural learning environments, spaces where each student's home culture(s) are affirmed within school culture. In this, creative pedagogy does not point to a curricular add-on or strategy, rather it alerts us to underlying conditions and values where the fundamentals of agency, community, and leadership are sowed into every student.



Figure 1, The Human Equation

### The Human Equation and Nova Scotia's Educational Priorities

Constantineau and McLuhan's *The Human Equation* (2010, 2012) argues that all professions or fields of human conception extend from our fundamental postures (see figure 1): we assume a posture when we stand or lie down; we can bend or articulate our bodies; our forms contract through isometrics; and we displace space when we walk. This can be translated into systems such as the four pillars of Nova Scotia's Action Plan (2015) (see figure 2). Pillar one – A Modern Education System – provides the assumed posture or pillar as the “firm foundation for change”

(p.15). Pillar two – An Innovative Curriculum – presents innovation as its ability to contract or coordinate the system, its administrators, teachers, and students to be “laser-focused on improving the two most important fundamentals in education: math and literacy” (p.18). Pillar four – Excellence in Teaching and Leadership – sets up educators to bend to the system's priorities. The third pillar – Inclusive School Environment – is displaced. Students rely on the system, along with its leaders, teachers, and curricula to provide sufficient space and support to pervasively meet their diverse and often unpredictable needs.

Paradoxically, in a system where inclusion of all students is the first pillar (see figure 3), the system would bend to provide the funding, facilities, and resources that the contracting empathetic teachers would have the autonomy and expertise to employ. The curriculum would follow in a more improvised and flexible form to meet the dynamically changing needs of students and the ‘real world’ they are preparing to join. In this model the teacher is a leader who looks to support the wellbeing, productivity, and development of all students in their care. When inspired, students strive to achieve their goals and to help others to do the same.



Figure 2, The Nova Scotia Action Plan for Education 2015



Figure 3, A model for school based in Improvised Knowings





Figure 4, Teachers as Leaders.

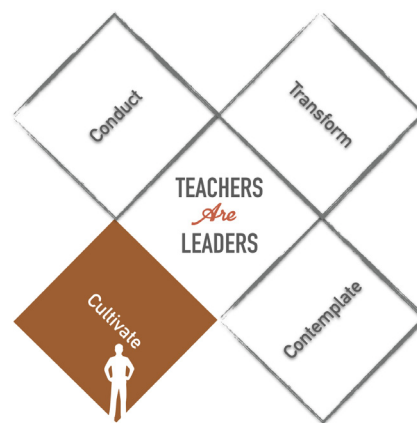
## Teachers as Leaders

The Human Equation provides a structure through which we can see a causal relationship found among the components of any field, including teaching. Teachers that bring out the best in students share four foundations of inspiring leaders. These foundations in turn, cultivate, contemplate, conduct, and transform students (see figure 4).

### Cultivate: the foundational posture

Schools exist to provide a physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe place for students and teachers to collaborate. As the assumed

posture, teachers cultivate learning spaces to enable student productivity in varied practices both independently and within learning communities. Teachers identify and address obstacles to feelings of safety and security within the learning community. Aware that these feelings are subjective, teachers will observe student behaviours and include them when fashioning effective learning spaces. In a safe and compassionate environment, teachers can then promote creative practices that nurture student agency leading to a positive, dynamic, and supportive learning community.



## Compassion

Compassionate teachers are sensitive to student needs and their empathetic actions indicate to students that they are flexible — determined for students to feel listened to and valued. Witnessing acts of compassion among teachers, towards students, and to themselves, students learn to form positive relationships. Compassion is expressed through wanting to encourage the best in people, not necessarily to coddle or indulge, more often to motivate and challenge. Compassionate teachers will challenge students to engage in enterprises that promotes their development — activities that remove comforts and induce growing pains with promises of achieving new heights — teachers also need to do this for themselves. As my cycling friend explained his route choices through France, following the Rhone is easy but the Alps offer the best view. Compassionate teaching is to personally practice and set the table for students to seek and conquer arduous opportunities that offer the greatest personal rewards.

## Creativity

Modern schools tend to deal with diversity and uncertainty by establishing a place for the *new* within its existing framework or by dismissing it. In contrast, it is more likely that the rapidly changing highly technical, socially diverse, and conceptually challenging environments of the 21st century will be led by those who are creatively adaptive and critically reflective improvisers (Corbett, 2013; Florida, 2012; Kelly, 2012). The World Economic Forum anticipates “creativity, logical reasoning and problem sensitivity” (WEF, 2016, p. 24) will comprise the core set of cognitive skills sought by employers post 2020. The good news here is that everyone is creative. We are creative when we arrive at novel solutions, ideas or insights. Creativity can happen in thoughts, on paper, in a field... anywhere. Creativity is also a dynamic force that suffers



when underappreciated. Creative journeys are fraught with both risks and rewards, and benefit from the secure ground laid by engaged and responsive teachers. Creativity needs purpose of pleasure, necessity, or adversity. It flourishes when we engage in activities that draw on multiple senses and encourage rapid ideation. Creative people seek multiple perspectives and avoid sorting their ideas into piles of winners and losers — the greatest insights often grow from mistakes as they are frequently unique and unexpected.

It's not news to suggest that modern schooling has successfully discouraged students from making mistakes, spending time freely imagining, pursuing curiosities, or running with impractical ideas. Such activities have been relegated to the arts, however, since the arts are part of an accountable modern education system, the arts will not afford much time or space for this frivolity. Though it is the nature of bureaucracies to discourage such inefficiencies, there are practical ways to spark the creative engines of imagination, ideation and the pursuit of personal curiosities into every classroom.

The philosopher R. G. Collingwood asserts that creative expression is “an activity of which there can be no technique” (1967, p. 111). Without a formulaic solution, creative engagement may be stimulated through the removal of obstacles to a sustained safe, secure, and supportive learning environment. Teachers can then employ creative strategies to approach problems. Approaches like Ideo's design thinking process tend to exercise capacities for inductive over deductive reasoning; the free juxtaposition of concepts; and the encouragement for students to imagine, explore, and implement even the otherwise ridiculous idea.

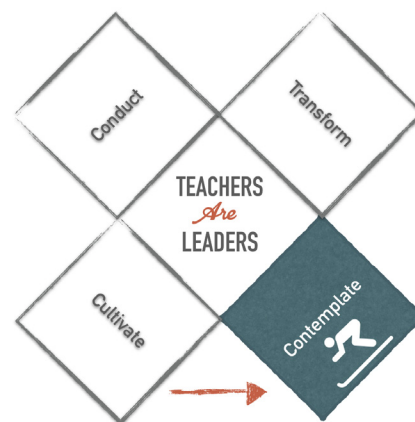
### **Agency & Community**

Students will always carry the winds of home with them to class. While some bring a pleasing breeze, others may cause a squall. Some strategies aimed at calming the storm may, instead, agitate it. Headwinds will cause turbulence, where finding a place for their current among that of the community influences a more harmonious and potentially joyous journey. Everyone needs to feel valued and their potential for positive personal power enlivened. Dr. Sharroky Hollie (2011) offers an approach to classroom community building through cultural and linguistic responsiveness. To Hollie, bi-culturalism means home and school cultures, or that of the dominant community, teachers know first hand how they can often be in conflict. Every student will bring in their home culture that inclusive teachers seek to validate, affirm, and build bridges (VABB). The loud, disruptive or profane student may be expressing social values they learned from home. Shutting down their expressions is exclusionary. To validate and affirm their disruption, while counterintuitive, brings the student into the greater community. This opens a channel for the teacher to have the student work with them to own their impact on the community and to develop appropriate responses to time and place. Dr. Hollie's VABB approach offers another way to remove obstacles to a safe, secure, and supportive environment.

If teachers approach a class with the assumption that student agency is a priority then empathy and compassion will be necessary. Teachers can compose learning experiences with and through student interests and capacities towards empowering student authority over their learning. Teachers may share interests and insights fostering unanticipated ideas to form — the impact of which is transformative for all parties. These leaders operate with faith that the more students practice working from their own perceptions the more they will find confidence, drive and growth while encouraging the same in others. In this sense, the teacher cultivates leadership within each and every student.

### Contemplate: Bend to grow

If you are not moving forward, you are falling behind. A well cultivated learning environment provides a foundation for evolution, which starts with forging approaches and environments that can bend to new phenomena. Here we contemplate where we are and what stimulates growth. Compassion sets the conditions to bend in response to the audience. Teachers do so by including student voice in every interaction as well as in planning and assessment. The contemplating teacher adapts to change, varied perspectives, and emergent obstacles. Their will to improvise breeds a culture of adaptability — where, when the path forward is confusing, the student is willing to try new tactics, both those offered to them and those they conceive. Improvising offers a way to go with the flow and steer its dynamics as opposed to struggling to yield to otherwise rigid structures.



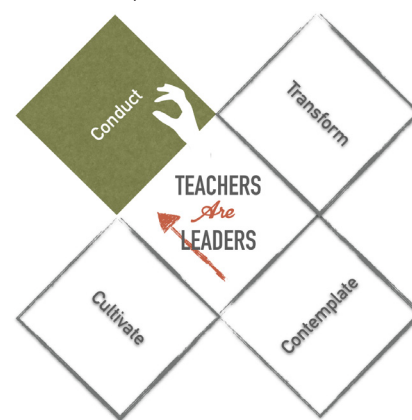
### Design Thinking — improvisation, collaboration, and agency

To improvise in the classroom means being open to collaboration; seeking collaborations is an expression of compassion. Conflicts and classroom challenges can be productively addressed through a design-thinking partnership with students. A collaborative approach allows teachers to focus on seeking positive solutions and mitigate negative interactions with students. A design-thinking (Ideo) approach is an all-party process, where everyone impacted by a problem is invited to participate in its solution. Here, a diverse group of collaborators bring forward and interpret a common set of facts. Participants ideate and propose reasonable solutions, where the compromised solution is applied as a prototype to later be assessed and revisited instead of being fixed in stone. Design thinking collaborations invite an infusion of diverse insights and talents to achieve a positive response to meaningful challenges, empowering student agency and minimizing negativity.

Smartphone distraction is among the larger classroom struggles, where every teacher tailors their own response to its presence. Some respond directly by attempting to ban it, where others put it to regular use. Both extremes have their own rewards and obstacles; what is important is that each teacher contemplates and explores solutions that work for them and the students — alternatively, stresses will grow when the solution is uncompromising and one sided. A design-thinking approach allows the teacher and students to jointly present and address their concerns. Impasses are resolved when everyone applies some empathy and their particular talents to find a solution. When a prototype solution is employed, the majority will be on board and dissenters can voice their concerns when the prototype is reassessed. A contemplating teacher may find design-thinking to be a useful tool both in this and other challenges that are ultimately their own to tackle.

### Conduct: Pull it all together

Conducting lessons through compassion, creativity, and student agency means teachers need to own their role as empowered educators. They are free to select resources, devise strategies, and determine learning targets. While teachers may feel accountable to the curriculum, the reality is that their success relies first and foremost on being accountable to their students. Students are not inspired by lessons designed to cover outcomes or collect data — they are engaged by lessons that connect to their lives. Considering

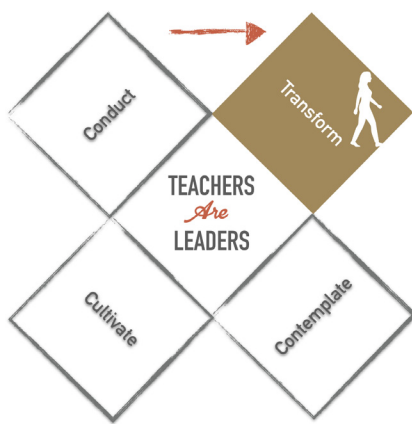




the breadth of learning outcomes; that for many courses were conceived in the rear-view mirror nearly two decades ago, it is within the power of each teacher to determine what and how learning priorities are experienced and assessed. Teachers process these priorities, a form of internal negotiation between interpreting the provincial curriculum, student interest and needs, teaching styles and strengths, and perhaps current relevant interests of a particular community or industry. Design-thinking can help determine how best to acquire and apply appropriate resources to serve broad learning and teaching strategies. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one approach countering the one-size-fits-all model of curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of all students through multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement (CAST, 2018).

For the most part, provincial curricula is vague — aiming to accommodate a kaleidoscope of visions — and therefore up to the professional teacher to interpret. Also, classrooms and most resources are issued to teachers as raw materials by the teacher to function as they see fit. The conducting teacher, therefore, is not a passenger or a technocrat, they are active leaders in shaping how and what students learn.

Teachers should, therefore, resist blindly adopting government policies and curriculum as biblical edicts. With their eyes wide open, teachers are poised to (re)establish themselves as leaders who can wield the system and its resources to serve the relative interest and development of each student. It is in these situations where students feel safe and free to take risks, to accept frustration, and persevere through it to new heights knowing that their teacher always has their back. This curriculum is not found in a government document, rather it exists in a space between the teacher and the student. In this affective relationship, where the teacher is positively responsive to the students they serve, stands the potential for student and community transformation.



### Transform teachers and students

The transformative teacher forges positive, trusting, and collaborative relationships with students. They exhibit confidence balanced by an openness to contemplate their practice and to broadly affirm student expressions and perspectives. Students learn that there is more to school than being able to know facts and to move through elaborate processes, instead it's about the struggles of growth and the rewards of rigour. School is about the vibrant and diverse personalities who provide energy and meaning to our day. It is through these dynamics that students open up to change, knowing that becoming the person they want to be is within their grasp and that good people, like teachers, endeavor to help them find their way.

Teachers are leaders when they steer students to own their development, talents, and struggles in a context where they feel supported and have opportunities to pay it forward. From this growth posture, students learn to look back with gratitude and look forward with optimism, seeking new ambitions that extend from their heightened capacities and self-confidence. As teachers modelled for them, it is hopeful that before they graduate, students know that leadership is a limitless resource to be cultivated in everyone.

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## *Conduct*



- Compositions of strategies & resources towards meeting student needs and curricular priorities. Re: design thinking
- Connectivity of diverse talents and perspectives with necessary resources. Adapting curricular priorities that suite your audience or team.
- For Synergy to streamline activities, resources, and partnerships.
- Spaces and approaches to affirm the multiplicities of capacities and bi-cultural sensibilities of those in your care. (critical & creative pedagogy)
- Teaching and learning towards affective /aesthetic assemblages (constructivism)

## *Transform*



- To seek positive conflict is to drive towards perpetual growth.
- Towards new ambitions based on heightened capacities
- Internalized changes. Be mindful of your growth and let others know of theirs. (Focus on the positive)
- Leadership as a limitless resource that to build cultivated in everyone.

## *Cultivate*

- Compassion: for others and yourself or care-giving and care-taking. Reaching out with empathetic eyes.
- Creativity: multi sensory, divergent thinking, rapid ideation and embracing mistakes.
- Agency & Community: seek and nourish bi-cultural understanding and support individual drive. Also, **Remove obstacles to allow for a safe, secure, and supportive environment.**



## *Contemplate*

- Audience: bending to include their voice
- Adaptivity: open to facing difference and obstacles phenomenologically - improvisation.
- Vision: develop a shared vision to move towards
- Mastery: how to better the abilities of all
- Talent infusion: seeking diverse perspectives and skill sets.
- Struggles: focusing on worthwhile challenges by distinguishing them from negativity.







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