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School Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

by Jenny Williams

Last November in Abbotsford, we were shocked and saddened by the loss of a beautiful young high school student and the injury of her friend in a senseless act of violence. The nature of this attack is incomprehensible and extremely rare. In most situations, violence is not random, and there are often clues that could provide some forewarning.

The past year has been one of the most violent for Canadian schools. What are we doing to monitor risk potential and prevent violence in our schools and communities? Are there effective ways to respond to violence and intervene early?

What has led to the increase in violence in schools?

The potential for serious violence is increasing in our communities throughout British Columbia. Four of the factors that have contributed towards an increase in violence are:

Changing patterns of family and community life

Children are more isolated from parents; divorce, abuse, poverty, drugs and other forces are disrupting families and with this comes some loss of socialization skills.

Redefining violence as normal and acceptable

Exposure to violence has become commonplace through media and technology. It causes us to become immune to some levels of violence and impacts socialization and development of empathy. Viewing violence in television, movies and video games, and listening to music about violence impacts the development of empathy in youth. The promotion of drugs and violence as an acceptable lifestyle in film and media is growing.

Greater access to drugs and weapons than ever before

A rise in substance use, and the combination of access to weapons and drugs has resulted in much of the current violence. Alcohol and drug misuse leads to the loss of self-control and violent acts.

Increasing exposure to negative influences on the internet and social media

Widespread instant messaging and social media can contribute to psychological trauma and impaired impulse control. They can escalate the speed of communication, facilitate the planning of threats and cyberbullying, and spread false information or circulate details that increase the impact of trauma.

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School Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

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Are there any warning signs?

The path to serious violence is usually an evolutionary process often beginning with worrisome behaviour that evolves into a more serious threat. A threat is defined as an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. Threats may be verbal, written, drawn, posted on the internet, or made by gesture.

1. Most students who pose a substantive threat indicate their intentions ahead of time in some way. Examples of threats to school communities include statements made to friends, creating or sharing hit-lists, conspiring and planning attacks, social media postings that threaten harm, or talking extensively about violence, death, and weapons.
2. Bullying is one precursor of more extreme forms of hostility, and is a stage on the way to more violent behaviour.
3. Risk enhancers that increase the likelihood that a threat is more serious include:
 - Personality and behaviour: coping with conflict, dealing with anger, resilience, lack of empathy, low frustration tolerance, depression, narcissism, absenteeism
 - Family dynamics: parent-child interaction, lack of limits
 - School dynamics: attachment to school, perceived lack of status at school, perception of inequitable discipline, code of silence
 - Social dynamics: failed relationships, choice of friends, drug and alcohol use

What can schools do to help prevent violence?

Locking the school's door will not solve all the problems associated with violence. The best defence is human detectors. So, what are the factors that will likely make the greatest difference?

1. Build a positive school climate. **School climate** is defined as the quality of the relationships within the community. One of the best violence prevention strategies is the promotion of a climate that fosters trusting, respectful relationships among students, staff and families. Students who feel respected and connected tend to be healthier and display less *acting-out* behaviour.
2. Encourage students to take responsibility for their part in maintaining safe school environments by reporting worrisome behaviour through an anonymous reporting tool or confiding in a trusted adult. Educate students on **breaking the code of silence** and reporting potential threats in a confidential way – if you “*See Something, Say Something*”.
3. Conduct **staff training about worrisome behaviours**, and

put in place a system for communication with administration about these behaviours and effective intervention for dealing with worrisome behaviours.

4. Have key staff leaders participate in **levels 1-3 ERASE Bullying training** which introduces the *Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA)*. Threat assessment is a violence prevention strategy that involves:
 - determining if a student poses a threat of violence
 - ascertaining the seriousness of the threat, and
 - developing intervention plans that protect potential victims and address the underlying problem or conflict that stimulated the threatening behaviour
5. **Social media** can be monitored by creating a **geofence** which automatically audits local social media content relating to student and staff safety. It allows for proactive intervention by identifying sources of potential risks or threats in real time.
6. Provide training for students and parents related to **digital citizenship** and the appropriate use of the internet and social media. Safer Schools Together provides workshops on Social Media Awareness, Digital Citizenship and Cyberbullying for students, parents and school staff.
7. **Control access to the school building** (designated entrance with all other access points locked from the exterior), strengthen security around the access points and monitor school guests.
8. **Supervise** school parking lots and common areas such as hallways, cafeterias, and playing fields with supervisors who interact positively with students while handling rule violations quickly and consistently. An effective supervisor facilitates improved student citizenship and contributes to a positive school climate.

School safety is everyone's responsibility and includes vigilance on the part of administrators, staff, students, parents, community agencies and the public as a whole. We all have a significant role to play in making our schools caring and safe places where students are protected and supported.

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References

- Basic Threat & Risk Assessment Training Guide – Level Two*. 8th Edition. 2015, Province of British Columbia.
- Emergency Management Planning Guide for Schools, Districts and Authorities*. 2015, Province of British Columbia.
- Social Media and School Crises: Brief Facts and Tips*. School Safety and Crisis. National Association of School Psychologists. www.nasponline.org.

Leading Beyond Fear by Ed Noot

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Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God – Luke 1:30
.....

The world is seeing a sharp rise of populism and nationalism. These changes are taking root in North America, Europe and elsewhere. Populism contains diverse aspects, but is commonly based on fear and can be expressed in anger and hate masquerading as bravado. When populist parties and leaders are in power, vulnerable and marginalized people can find themselves at increased risk.

The recent US election demonstrated that there is a direct link between populist politics and schools, as

some incidents of bullying, harassment and racism broke after the election – seemingly based on election rhetoric which was frequently broadcast during the weeks preceding the vote. Suddenly racist acts that were unthinkable before became acceptable as deep-seated fears and anger had become legitimized.

As Christian school leaders (board and administration), our leadership messages and behaviour matter because they shape behaviour of youth and our school culture. What messages do our students, staff and parents perceive as they watch the leaders in our schools? Is our governing and leading; development of policy and procedure; response to culture and the media; and, curriculum and program development driven by fear and reaction to perceived threats?

While leaders certainly need to be aware of potential threats, fear can motivate us to judgment and isolation as our primary *ways of being*. I've been a supporter of Christian education my whole life, and remain passionately so today. I do, however, from time to time wonder if Christian schools have led us to isolate our students in unhealthy ways and to create an us/them, saints/sinners type of mentality that restricts us from walking the road of reconciliation and shalom.

SCSBC advocates that school boards pay close attention to their primary function of *protecting*. As a key part of governance, boards are to protect the mission and vision of the

school; guard finances to ensure viability and sustainability; and shield the school from legal risk.

This protection mode needs to be tempered by Jesus' reminder of the centrality of reconciliation. Leaders need to function within the context of a proactive stance, as is often expressed in our mission statements. Many of our mission statements express a desire to engage, impact and transform culture for Christ. These are bold ambitions that can only be realized by taking our lead from Jesus' leader-

ship message as centered on reconciliation. He often avoided the halls of power to deliver this message of hope to the least of these. John 3:16 reads, "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son ..." As

such, John 3:16 gives a global, wholistic focus to God's love through Jesus. How do our schools demonstrate this love of Jesus for the world and how do our schools demonstrate his passion for the marginalized?

Paul, in 2 Corinthians, characterizes Christ's work as an act of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18- 20 would form an interesting mandate for leadership in our Christian schools. Reconciliation with God, with fellow humans (both inside and outside of our community) and with the world itself will give our leadership a proactive stance based on a positive imperative. This stance will allow us to have an impact: perhaps through a transforming influence (as articulated in Richard Niebuhr's classic typology, *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper, 1951.); or via a faithful presence (as articulated by James Hunter in *To Change the World*, Oxford University Press Inc., 2010.).

If we can root our leadership in reconciliation, we'll avoid the pitfalls of fear and anger that populism presents. While being aware of potential threats our primary leadership stance will be proactive and missional, seeking to advance reconciliation and shalom through the community of learners in our Christian school.

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2 Corinthians 5:18-20 *New International Version*

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Combatting Implementation Fatigue

I think it might be time for school staff to play a board game during the next staff meeting. Not just any board game though. Teachers need to be reintroduced to a classic board game, *Snakes and Ladders*. Over the past few years we have learned that Marshall McLuhan's statement, "The medium is the message," is also relevant for education. Our medium as educators is our pedagogy. As we move from a content-focused curriculum to a competency-based education system, the role of pedagogy becomes far more significant.

The board game *Snakes and Ladders* is relevant here because of what it models about life and learning. Passionate, invested, professional educators, regardless of years in service, are entering an intense professional learning phase in education in British Columbia. Getting to *square 100*, the top square on the professional learning board game of *Snakes and Ladders*, is far more rigorous professionally than it has ever been. Educators who respect their profession are all working hard toward obtaining new professional competencies and skills in order to better support learning and student development.

The learning methods teachers hope to share and develop in their students must first be internalized in the educators' professional learning. Educators must have personalized plans for professional growth in order to move forward in this time of significant educational change. Educators must wrestle with questions regarding impact of any chosen pedagogy on student learning. Though knowledge acquisition may be impacted more by the content being covered, student learning and mindset is impacted more by how the learning takes place.

Learning is not linear. There is no straight line from ignorance to mastery. The assembly line works for non-thinking robots, not for the complex process of learning. This is especially the case when the learners are image bearers of a God who is revealed in the sometimes unexplainable complexities of life. This is where the simple child's game of *Snakes and Ladders* is so profound. Why is it so easy to encourage students to take risks, to fail and slide down a snake, and yet refuse to encourage this in our

own professional learning and within the learning culture of the staff? If we refuse to embrace the growth mindset attributes in our own professional learning, we risk two significant consequences which are hard to overcome.

The long-term consequence of not walking a similar learning transformation journey with our students is a further alienation between students "real lives" and school. If teachers promote a way of learning without modeling this learning professionally, they will be perceived as irrelevant hypocrites who are not worthy of a student's time. For students in middle and secondary school, the consequences of a perceived irrelevance in a school that lacks strong student-teacher relationships is already being seen and felt through student apathy, disengagement, low achievement, and truancy. One of the most effective ways of changing this troubling direction is for teachers to pursue growth and learning in their pedagogical skill with the same passion, risk taking, and snake sliding they hope to see in their students. Mistakes, when they happen, are acknowledged openly and growth is demonstrated through a transparent reorientation of the pedagogy.

The short term consequence is potentially just as troubling. Invested teachers and schools who are unwilling to embrace a *Snakes and Ladders* approach to learning for staff and students are at a high risk of burn out and breakdown. Educators are used to having all the answers. They are used to being right, doing it right, and for many, their identity is tied to how good they are at doing it right. With a shift in focus, many of the choices teachers made which used to be right are no longer so. This throws well-meaning, passionate educators into a state of flux that is emotionally draining. Often the reaction is to either force the new paradigm and pedagogical focus into the old paradigm and methods or to flit from one idea to the next, but not grabbing hold of any one new idea for an extended amount of time. For many teachers, deciding where to start with curricular modernization is like completing a Google search that shows more than one million results. But the stakes are higher. There is no compliance or teacher evaluation with a google search. This state of flux can be demoralizing or immobilizing for even great educators. The current process of curriculum modernization is exciting but can feel daunting for educators.

Right now, as an educator in BC, there are more than ten key components of the modernized curriculum and each of these components is being built on a new paradigmatic foundation – *competency development*. It is impossible to be excellent in all of these areas within a few years of implementation. Yet, educators in BC pride themselves in being excellent, progressive, implementers of educational reform. Adjusting to not having all of the answers is new for many teachers, especially teachers who were hired based on their knowledge of a content area. A school's culture must leave space to repeatedly acknowledge that moving into the new paradigm may bring with it a sense of loss for a content specialist. The school culture must also leave space for unknowns, wrong answers, and a willingness to try "what we believe is the best answer right now." Change needs to be progressive, one step at a time, with a commitment to rest when needed, but to always be looking and plotting the next move toward that *100 square*. Students in school need change now, not in a few years when we may have all of the answers.

In the age of curriculum modernization, schools need to live the very message being modeled provincially and celebrated by educators as keys to student readiness in a new and changing world. Schools need to model taking

risks, rising from failure, and developing perseverance and grit in the process. Learning is messy work, no longer well represented through the clean and sterile overuse of lecture, rote memorization, and multiple choice tests. The key to boldly moving forward in improving our education system is two or three clear non-negotiables. Once schools have established non-negotiables, they are freed to make bold, often risk-filled decisions knowing that the school

..... will stay true to the direction established. Schools are encouraged to create two or three mission oriented non-negotiables which

Changing a cultural mindset is essential for growing into the modernized curriculum

..... will guide localized educational transformation. For one school, it meant establishing *Strengthening Community* and *Student Ownership* as key non-negotiables. Decisions about grade-level groupings, cross-curricular learning, cross-graded year planning, and many other initiatives broke down the artificial barriers of schedule, grade level, and individual classroom autonomy. This was done when it was expected that the changes would improve learning, community, and student ownership. Without the two or three specific guiding non-negotiables, the school would have been far more susceptible to the pressures and whims of the plethora of good educational ideas floating around Twitter.

Changing a cultural mindset is essential for growing into the modernized curriculum. To do that effectively, school leaders must work with staff to develop non-negotiables. These become the *100 square* for schools as they wrestle with good context-based decisions. This way of thinking allows schools to be flexible as they move forward. As student populations change, non-negotiables allow the freedom to adjust schedules, programs, and student groupings to best meet the learning needs of the students in the school now.

As you continue on the journey of implementation as a school leader, ask yourself two questions: "What is in our school's *100 square* right now?" and "How is the school culture supporting teachers who take a learning risk and end up sliding down a snake, rather than climbing up a ladder?"

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Key Elements of Curriculum Modernization

1. Embedded First Peoples Connection
2. Inquiry
3. Personalized Learning
4. Know, Do, Understand Model
5. Interdisciplinary Learning
6. Aligned Assessment and Evaluation
7. Connected to Real-life Situations
8. Big Ideas
9. Reporting and Communication of Learning
10. Technology Integration/Coding

Volunteer Engagement: *Continued*

Volunteer engagement is something most of our schools struggle with. How can you inspire people to turn their commitment to your school into passion-driven service?

This is not necessarily a capacity issue, but potentially a strategic one.

In each of your school communities, there are people who are looking for opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. The challenge you face is how to bridge the gap between what they are looking for and how you can authentically engage them in meaningful volunteer roles.

Let's look at some general trends that are impacting volunteer engagement across Canada.

Recent research conducted by Volunteer Canada suggests that the biggest barrier to volunteering is the lack of time. Increasingly, we are seeing dual income families, which significantly reduces their ability to make large volunteer commitments. The next most common is the inability to make a year-round commitment. The research also indicates a growing desire for more direct impact, particularly with millennials. These barriers demonstrate a need for us to find ways to accommodate busy, dynamic schedules, to value volunteers' time and to address their motivations for volunteering. Most are primarily motivated by meaning: to help others, to feel good about themselves and to support something they care strongly about. They have a desire to make a difference. How can you help them do that?

General Strategies

Focus first on the volunteer, not the role. Take the time to match volunteer roles based on skills and interest; adapt and change roles to best suit individuals and the school.

In order to appropriately match the volunteer to the role, you need to know them. Is he/she an achiever, an affliator or an influencer?

Achievers welcome challenge, are committed to accomplishing goals, and look for opportunities to test out new skills and improve performance. They are innovative, results-oriented, take risks and enjoy overcoming barriers.

Affliators value relationship, enjoy working with others, and seek opportunities to be helpful and supportive. They are sensitive to the feelings and needs of others and support others in achieving goals.

Influencers seek to influence people and events so that change is realized. They are charismatic leaders, opinion shapers, articulate and often assertive.

Be intentional about personally asking people already in your volunteer base: "In the past you've done...have you thought about doing...?"

Ensure that volunteers know exactly what is expected of them by communicating the goals and objectives of their involvement, the time commitment, and how their work will contribute to fulfilling the school's mission and vision. If busy people are going to volunteer their time, they want to feel that their time will be used well.

Report back to your volunteers on the results of their involvement and how they made an impact.

Recruitment Strategies

Create a *culture of involvement* by engaging new parents as soon as they join the school. Consider tapping into another group of potential volunteers who have an established emotional connection to your school – your grandparents.

- ▶ Start new volunteers off small. Don't scare them away with too huge a commitment too soon.
- ▶ Speak with potential volunteers face-to-face when looking to fill longer term or leadership roles.
- ▶ Take the time to authentically welcome volunteers and orient them to their new role.
- ▶ Provide clarity:
 - What experience, specific skill sets, personal qualities or talents are you looking for?
 - What is the time commitment? How many hours over what time period? Is it flexible? Can work be done from home?
 - Who is the responsible staff person? Clear lines of communication and accountability are important. This also provides a context for handling potential conflicts.
- ▶ Design volunteer positions for varying levels of responsibility, commitment and experience.
- ▶ Provide as much flexibility as possible.
- ▶ Share the impact your school is having on student lives and how volunteers can participate in the exciting work God is doing at your school.
- ▶ And finally, ask!



Retention Strategies

Volunteers leave for a number of reasons: the experience was not what they had expected, they were underutilized, they did not feel that their contribution was meaningful, they experienced conflict with other volunteers or staff, or they burned out.

So what can you do to keep your volunteers inspired and involved?

- ▶ Keep the workload manageable. We often create situations where too much work is being done by too few people.
- ▶ Create an environment that ensures open communication, teamwork and respect for diversity.
- ▶ Foster opportunities for volunteers to work collaboratively.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for volunteers to learn and grow.
- ▶ Connect volunteer contributions to the bigger picture.
- ▶ Show volunteers that you respect their time and efforts by always being prepared for them.
- ▶ Be clear about your expectations while providing flexibility.
- ▶ Find out what their passions and gifts are, and place them where they can excel.
- ▶ Ensure your goals are realistic, relevant and achievable. There is no quicker way to burn out volunteers than by making them reach for an impossible target.
- ▶ Graciously give and receive feedback.

Personalize your strategies by reflecting on your own volunteer experiences and what made them either positive or negative ones.

Recognition Strategies

Knowing your volunteers helps you understand how they prefer to be recognized. For some this will be public recognition. For others it will be a coffee and a chat or an encouraging phone call. And for a few it will be opportunities for leadership and involvement in decision-making.

Whatever the approach, here are some important thanking strategies.

- ▶ Recognize the person, not the work.
- ▶ Recognize effort, not just accomplishment.
- ▶ Recognize consistently.
- ▶ Recognize honestly, suitable to the achievement.
- ▶ Focus on impact and the collaborative efforts of volunteers and staff.
- ▶ Tailor recognition to reflect the volunteer's level of engagement.
- ▶ Always acknowledge that time is a precious commodity and that you place a high value on the volunteer's gift of time.

National Volunteer Week is April 23-29. Plan to celebrate and thank your volunteers, recognizing their contribution to your school community. However, remember that ongoing recognition is essential in helping those faithful people who provide passion-driven service to your school feel appreciated and engaged year-round.

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Resources

Volunteer Canada, www.volunteer.ca
Head Heart and Hands Engagement, www.headhearhandsengagement.com
Volunteer Hub, www.volunteerhub.com/blog/engage-volunteers
Charity Village, www.charityvillage.com
Vantage Point, www.thevantagepoint.ca

NEWS AND EVENTS

March 7-8, 2017

SCSBC

Business AND Development CONFERENCE

for Christian Schools

The annual SCSBC Business and Development Conference takes place at Cedar Springs Christian Retreat Center on March 7-8, 2017. This is an excellent professional development opportunity for business staff, development staff, board members, principals and superintendents. As well as a great lineup of speakers and workshops, the event offers rich interaction with other professionals who also work in Christian schools. Many of our participants say it is a not-to-be-missed event. Our keynote speaker is Jim McKenzie, headmaster of The Rock School in Gainesville, Florida, and marketing and enrollment consultant for the Van Lunen Center. Registration is open: www.busdev2017.scsbc.net.

SAVE THE DATE

March 7-8, 2017
SCSBC Business and Development Conference
at
Cedar Springs, Sumas

Plenary Speaker:
Jim McKenzie

busdev2017.scsbc.net

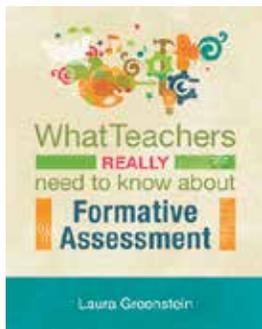
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November 4, 2017
SCSBC Leadership Conference and Annual General Meeting
at
Surrey Christian School

Keynote Speaker:
Zach Clark

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Recommended Resources



What Teachers Really Need to Know About Formative Assessment

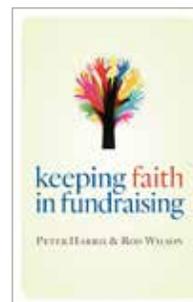
by Laura Greenstein

What do you really need to know in order to make formative assessment a seamless part of your everyday practice? This book includes dozens of strategies for measuring student understanding and diagnosing learning needs, illustrations of formative assessment across the content areas, guidance on making data-informed instructional adjustments, sample templates for organizing assessment data to track both whole-class and individual progress toward identified goals, and case studies to illustrate effective and ineffective formative assessment. This resource will help you take formative assessment from theory to practice and from practice to genuine learning improvement.

Keeping Faith in Fundraising

by Peter Harris and Rod Wilson

Fundraising has always been an essential element of the Christian life. Churches, schools, and many other organizations rely on it to function. But it is a risky enterprise, fraught with questions and challenges. How can Christians raise funds with integrity? In this book Peter Harris and Rod Wilson bring fundraising within the scope of normal Christian life and work. They consider fundraising in light of the relationships that lie at its heart – with God, with creation, and with ourselves.



Featured Website

teaching.scsbc.ca

As the SCSBC Directors of Learning travel around the province helping schools to implement BC's new curriculum, they have written articles and created resources to enhance teaching and learning in this paradigm. This website curates that collection of material.



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