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Truth and Grace

by Ed Noot

Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that, unless we love the truth, we cannot know it. ~ Blaise Pascal

Truth is in short supply these days, some would say. As the 17th century mathematician Blaise Pascal reminds us, this sentiment is not a recent expression. As civilization develops, old notions, sometimes viewed as indisputable truths, are replaced by new discoveries or radical thought. Pascal, a devout Catholic, lived during tumultuous times. Only a century earlier, a young priest named Martin Luther, shook the theological foundations of the Church by posting 95 theses on the church door in Wittenburg, prompting the beginning of the protestant reformation. During Pascal's life, art, education, religion, politics, economics and industry were changing rapidly, and scientific revolution was in full swing.

As with so many historical developments, the scientific revolution encompassed both positive and negative elements. Scientists recognized that the universe was heliocentric not geocentric, a discovery that many Christians of the day viewed as heretical. They made startling discoveries in math and science that had major a impact on industry, building and medicine. But in the midst of these positive developments, many academics also grew more humanistic. Knowledge and reason led people to view God as distant, irrelevant and, for some, non-existent. Scientific discovery became the new hope for civilization. Science came to be viewed as the saviour. No wonder then, that Pascal lamented the obscurity of truth.

Today many Christians also lament the obscurity of truth and feel that Christian values are threatened. Once again the church is called to face tough issues and to determine what stands as truth.

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Truth and Grace

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For example, Christian schools are founded on the relevance of biblical truth to all of life. Our mission statements and foundational documents articulate our core beliefs and values. But do we always get it right? At times, do we need to re-examine some long held convictions? In her book *Graciously Unapologetic*, Deborah Byker-Benson points out that many Christian schools have long ignored, or misinterpreted, God's commands to be welcoming and hospitable to the sojourner, foreigner and unbeliever. She argues that we have overlooked critical aspects of scripture in framing our school mission as designed for only Christian families, a belief that is enshrined in many school mission statements. Her case is compelling and worthy of consideration. She contends that when the outsider is welcomed as part of the community as scripture requires, the school must take a position of being graciously unapologetic. This posture, Benson argues, is just where God wants His people to be. Living faithfully by embodying grace and sharing truth is meant to happen in the context of outsiders, not just in an exclusive, club-like atmosphere for those who meet the criteria of membership.

"Many Christian schools use admissions policies as an attempt to guard the "purity" of the organization through control rather than with truth and meaningful, gracious relational engagement."

~ Deborah Byker-Benson ¹

Being graciously unapologetic is not an easy balance to achieve. As Jesus vividly demonstrated, the Pharisees were all about truth, but lacked sufficient grace. Think of His encounters with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and with the adulterous woman in the temple courts (John 8). Jesus' approach is so different from the paternalistic, legalistic response of the religious scholars of the day. He shatters the contemporary norms and understandings, relating to people with grace and uncompromising truth.

How is this posture relevant to us today? What are the contemporary issues where Christians are called to act with truth and grace? The list would include issues like

poverty, homelessness, refugees/immigration, developing nations, climate change and pollution.

How about our journey with First Nations people? This topic would certainly make my *truth and grace* list. Canada has adopted the terms *Truth and Reconciliation*, and many Christians are embracing the call to truth and reconciliation as a fitting response to our First Nations. While I'm thankful for this response, it grieves me that Christians were not leading the way on this important social issue. Truth and reconciliation are profoundly biblical concepts (2 Corinthians 5:18) and should have been the hallmark of the Christian community's behaviours towards First Nations people. The Christian community had an opportunity to be out front on this issue and to show the rest of Canada a more excellent way.

In this context, another topic for conversation is sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). An SCSBC working group has been hard at work in this area for over a year and our SOGI guide was released this fall. This publication builds on the work done by SCSBC in 2009 when *Same Gender Attraction: A Discussion Among our Christian School Communities* was published. These documents are designed to provide guidance for schools as they navigate what can be turbulent waters in the discussion of issues around sexual orientation and gender identity.

The 2017 SOGI guide document recognizes that not all of our schools will be at same place on this topic. It puts student safety first and frames the discussion as one that must be marked by an earnest search for truth and an uncompromising commitment to grace. When our communities walk in the balance between truth and grace, our schools will be found faithful to Jesus' new commandment of love (John 13: 33, 34).

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References

- ¹ Byker-Benson, Deborah. *Graciously Unapologetic: A Renewed Way to Be in Christian Schools*. p. 83. 2016, Credo House Publishers.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

A Culture of Continuous Improvement

by Darren Spyksma

Inertia is the tendency to remain unchanged¹ in your direction. In education, the yearly cycle of the school calendar helps build inertia. Inertia creates patterns. Patterns create ruts. Like ruts in the mud that bake hard in the hot summer sun, educational ruts formed by yearly repetition can become so comfortable that teachers and schools might forget that travelling in those ruts is a choice.

Learning to design learning using a curriculum flexible enough to be open to improvement is the new reality.

Learning to design learning using a curriculum adaptable to student needs and interests is the new provincial context.

Learning to design learning that changes significantly each year based on the group of students' Core Competency needs should be the goal of every educator in the province.

The days of static, shrink-wrapped curriculum are finished. Educators need to understand that being a professional means approaching each school year knowing that change is expected and encouraged, that the ruts of the educational status quo need to be pushed against in order to make meaningful change in the lives of students.

The world is changing. The work force is changing. The number of robots completing manufacturing tasks around the world is projected to be 2.6 million by 2019.² Most likely, for any job that can be automated, someone in the world is developing a robot to do just that. There is every chance that this year's Kindergarten students, if they end up living in an urban centre, will never need to learn to drive. We all feel the shift. The world is changing before our very eyes.

It follows that education needs to continue to change. Classrooms across British Columbia are implementing a modernized curriculum. This implementation is an ongoing process that involves a multi-year commitment to adjust the learning and teaching paradigm, a shift designed to better equip students for flourishing in our rapidly changing world. Paradigm shifts are significant, take substantial effort and time, and involve climbing out of educational ruts. Anyone who has ricocheted along a rutted dirt road knows how rough and sometimes exhausting getting out of ruts can be. Intellectual and emotional paradigm shifts are more difficult to navigate than any rutted road.

To ensure a school-wide paradigm shift, administrators must emphasize the development of a culture of continuous improvement. Cultural development takes discipline, courage, persistence, and common sense oriented around processes that remind all participants of what is important.³ Cultural development involves collective responsibility and

common objectives. It is up to a school's leadership to ensure that all staff understand their role in fulfilling the common objectives that will lead to improved learning, which will give students the opportunity to experience a life of awareness of who they are in Christ and how they are to respond to this awareness.

A school leader supports cultural formation in many ways. Two of these ways are through the modeling of habits, and through the development of a system that supports continuous improvement.

For some school leaders, the modeling of habits is best done through the development of a *Little Things* list. By examining professional habits in relation to some guiding questions, leaders can connect their habits to the growth of a culture of continuous improvement. The little habits of a leader have a significant impact on the school community and culture of the school. By answering the *Little Things* questions, leaders can intentionally develop a list of habits that will support a culture of continuous improvement.

Little Things

- What do my morning routines before the bell teach my staff about what is important?
- How do I make myself visible to my parent community?
- Where am I when there are children in the hallways?
- How do I support risks in the classroom?
- How does my staff know that I listen to them and their ideas?
- How often do I remind staff of what is important?
- How do my staff meetings show respect to my staff?

To develop a system that supports a culture of continuous improvement, school leaders must be willing to part with any system, structure, routine, or event that does not intentionally support or improve learning. Any time schools choose a system or structure with the purpose of benefitting teachers, and assume it will improve learning, they are mistaken. Without a level of accountability, this misguided decision may make teaching easier but will not necessarily result in more meaningful learning. Educators must understand that once a team or staff know a better way to support students in their learning, they are morally responsible to act. Not next year, not next semester, not

even next month. If we know a better way, we need to act now. We owe action to the students walking the halls this year. The long term goal is for action-oriented planning to be part of a staff's way of being during discussions in a staff meeting, in the halls, or anytime educators are wrestling with a problem or reflecting on any aspect of their practice.

In order to make this a reality, each spring school leaders need to spend time asking staff three questions: *What do we need to keep? What do we need to toss? What do we need to tweak?*⁴ A staff member who is clear about why they are there and what they are trying to achieve will improve learning through this process. More importantly, repeating this routine each spring will assist the school in developing a culture of continuous improvement.

This activity is not always easy. Sometimes it will feel unnatural and rough, similar to turning your wheels while driving in a rut. Early on, some of the changes that are attempted may not work, giving some teachers an excuse to keep travelling in their educational rut. For educators who enjoy the status quo or who did well as a student within a similar system, this process is nerve-wracking. In these moments when educators long for the status quo, they need to remember that school is not about teaching and what teachers want, it is about learning and what students need. If this is the goal, schools should be adjusting their practices and systems each year to better suit the group of students entering the grade level or division.

For schools that embrace this way of thinking, continuous improvement becomes the norm. They have years where a division has both co-ed and all boy's classes. They have years where chapel emphasizes community development and others when it focuses on spiritual disciplines. They teach some units based on interest rather than age or classroom assignment while dividing students based on ability in other units. Once schools truly embrace a culture of continuous improvement, each year is an adventure in improving learning for the specific group of students present in the school.

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References

- 1 <https://www.bing.com/search?q=inertia&form=EDGTCT&q=PF&cvid=efdc23cbf39e45268138dc8225fe3bcf&cc=CA&setlang=en-US&PC=LSJS>
- 2 <https://ifr.org/ifr-press-releases/news/world-robotics-report-2016>
- 3 P. Lencioni, (2012). *The Advantage*.
- 4 Thanks Bill De Jager for first challenging me with this idea ten years ago.

Many leaders struggle to prioritize their focus when it comes to raising money. The number one challenge that we see in ministries is retaining donors, and regaining those who were lost. When it comes to raising money to move ministry forward, leaders tend to gravitate toward spending their energy to recruit new donors. I want to turn your focus toward the significant work of regaining donors because it's often more effective and a better return on your time and investment, both in energy and resources, than recruiting a new donor.

Regaining donors is important because it's another way that you can make sure you're stewarding the relationships with the people that God has already worked through to bring your ministry to this point. If you're so busy working on new strategies and recruiting new donors, you can lose sight of this.

We begin with the discipline of evaluating who our *donors to regain* actually are. Donors to regain are not new people who come along. These are people who gave prior to the last giving year (January 1 through December 31) and back as far as you can track, but have not given since. For example: if it is currently 2017, you would prepare a list of people who gave in 2015 or before, but not in 2016 or since.

It's important to know who these people are because the more time that goes by, the harder it is to regain a donor.

As you create your list of donors to regain, you need to see their names, and their previous giving to be able to total up the potential that this looks like. This can be a shocking list to behold – sometimes hundreds or even thousands of people representing hundreds of thousands of dollars given. When you look at the total giving this list represents, neglect of these relationships can be pretty heartbreaking from a stewardship perspective.

Here's the good news. If thanked and reported to on the impact of their past giving through excellent communication, these past donors really can be regained, and can have a greater impact on the future than ever before!

Your number one goal with these donors to regain is to spend this year thanking and reporting to them. Do everything you can to get them in the room with you for a face-to-face meeting or small group meeting. This will usually result in you then being able to challenge them to really think and pray about the future of your organization and their personal giving.

Courage to Regain Donors?

by Zach Clark

Be warned that looking at this list of names may be uncomfortable. You will probably uncover a sense of discouragement about how you lost track of these people. You may not know why they quit giving. Even worse, you may not know who some of these person are at all. There may be some emotional baggage – damage done, mistakes regretted. Maybe it had nothing to do with you or the people currently in your organization but it's certainly there, and when you look at those names, it just feels easier to go into new territory and work on a new list.



You will be tempted to start telling stories to yourself in your head about these people, and you might talk yourself out of doing the right things with them. But, be strong and resist that line of thinking. You don't really know what God is doing now in the lives of these people, even if you know a little bit about the past. I guarantee they are not where you last left them.

Just by prioritizing your time, communicating with them, and getting personally involved, often you'll find these people are willing to reconnect. They will meet with you or talk to you on the phone. They will read what you send them, especially if you reach out to them, and they will respond. They have a sense of ownership already, even if there was some emotional baggage. So, don't let those fears and stories in your head be an issue, but recognize that this is a good opportunity to move forward.

As you evaluate this list of donors to regain, I encourage you to see the potential and recognize that this is worth doing well. These are the people that God used to bring you to this point, and He may be working in their lives to prepare them to give in helping you move forward.

Help them see how God has used their giving in the past. If you can see it, then you can articulate that to them. Help them know what you're doing now in your ministry. This will position them to understand that there is an opportunity now that wasn't there before, and get them to really think and pray about what that means to them as a donor. Finally, you need to thank them well and report. Help them see how the past involvement was used by God to bring them to this point, and then ask them how they are feeling now toward the ministry, vision, and mission.

Often times, it's just listening that's needed. They just need to be heard. If there's junk there, they need to get that out and they need to know that you are listening. If you do all of that, it's remarkable how they will respond, and it frees you up to request that they begin investing in the future through their giving.

It takes a courageous leader to have these hard conversations.

Ultimately, regaining donors comes down to being personally engaged. Ask for their feedback, give them a real opportunity to have an impact now as you go forward that builds on their

past. Follow up as personally as possible. Also, get others involved who can listen well. This may be a favorite staff member to some of those folks, a board member, or a lead volunteer who is well known in the community.

Regaining donors is important. God will bless your efforts to shepherd these people well because these are the people that He already worked through to impact your ministry. He's already provided resources through these people. They just need to be listened to, brought up to speed, to know that you see them and know them, and to begin to imagine the kind of impact that they can have again.

Guest author Zack Clark is our keynote speaker at the SCSBC Leadership Conference on November 4, 2017. Building on years of experience in seeing God do impossible things for faith-based organizations, Zach has a big vision to see Christian organizations fully fund themselves to fulfill their God-given visions in this generation. Zack is the founder of Development and Leadership Coaching, a non-traditional service approach helping leaders grow and build a culture of generosity.

Personal and Social Core Competencies

One of the goals of educating children in school is to help them grow into caring, thoughtful, and reflective human beings who will be better able to face the challenges of today's society. Teachers promote the development of the moral self and critical skills, such as self-direction and regulation, problem-solving, collaboration, and independence. These skills promote godly living – acting justly and loving others. They also relate to the personal and social core competencies of the BC Education curriculum modernization. In Christian schools, we encourage students to walk in relationship with Him who enables us to do what is right and to love others in the power of His strength. We work to help students learn to live out what is right by using a school-wide approach with a common language that describes specific behavioural expectations that demonstrate the outworking of a life that bears the fruits of the Spirit. A school-wide approach focused on the personal and social core competencies is essential in promoting personal, social and emotional growth for all students.

How does the Ministry of Education define personal and social competency?

“Personal and social competency is the set of abilities that relate to students’ identity in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society. Personal and social competency encompasses the abilities students need to thrive as individuals, to understand and care about themselves and others, and to find and achieve their purposes in the world” (Ministry of Education, 2016).¹

The Ministry delineates three competencies within the set of personal and social competencies:

1 Positive Personal and Cultural Identity is about relationships, personal values and choices connected to understanding personal strengths and abilities.

2 Personal Awareness and Responsibility focuses on the development of self-determination, self-regulation and personal well-being. Self-determination is the process by which a person controls their path in life and sets goals along the way. Self-regulation relates to having children understand for themselves what works to help them regulate themselves. Well-being provides a focus on personal and emotional health.

3 Social Responsibility is an awareness and mindfulness about how to develop relationships and build community, how to care for the environment, how to problem solve and value diversity.

How does using school-wide behaviour expectations foster personal, social and emotional development?

When a school-wide matrix of positive behaviour expectations is the basis for teaching pro-social, emotional and behavioural skills, the consistency of language and teaching helps to support the successful development of these skills in all students. Using the best instructional practices allows students to internalize these expectations better. When we give them clear expectations, teach them well and reinforce them well, we help children understand what they need to do to develop personal and social core competencies. All adults in the school can be responsible to effectively reinforce social and emotional skills anywhere in the building by naming, noticing and nurturing positive student behaviours. For example, teachers may use the strategy of *notice and name* to reinforce the skill of respecting the environment by saying, “Bonnie, I noticed that you picked up the garbage that someone else left on the floor. You are respecting the environment. Thanks for doing that.” When we give them clear expectations, teach them well and reinforce them well, we help children understand what they need to do to develop personal and social core competencies.

How can we support students who have challenges in developing personal, social and emotional skills?

To help organize and promote growth in academics, we often apply a tiered approach. In Tier 1, all students receive instruction within the classroom to further reading, writing, communicating and other academic skills. Approximately 15% of students will require further Tier 2 support, which involves targeted small group instruction. At Tier 3 another 5% may need intensive individualized instruction requiring highly specialized approaches. This tiered approach works effectively for the development of behaviour, social and emotional skills as well as academics.

Example Tier 2 Strategy: Check-in Check System

Many schools have developed a school-wide positive behaviour matrix that defines the goals and behaviour expectations for students. For example, Hope Lutheran Christian Elementary School in Port Coquitlam has four school-wide behaviour expectations that relate to the personal and social core competencies:

Respect: We show respect to receive respect

Love: We love because He first loved us



by Jenny Williams

RECOMMENDED

Check out these resources

Encouragement: We encourage each other to act in love and do our best

Adoration: We lift up praise and adoration to God for sending His Son

At Hope Lutheran, everyone gets basic instruction in behavioural expectations or Tier 1 instructions. Students who have difficulty developing some of the personal and social core competency skills have the option of participating in the Check-in Check-out system, a Tier 2 support, which is particularly effective for students who are motivated by adult attention. In this system, students meet with an adult before and after school to review up to three personal and social goals and discuss how they have done. They come to school five minutes early to meet with an adult. Each goal area has a behaviour expectation and core competency that a student assesses when meeting with the adults and graphing their progress shows if the intervention is working. The idea is to get positive attention for meeting expectations.

An example Check-in Check-out goal using the school-wide behaviour expectation language is, "I can be respectful of others (goal) by letting others work or listen quietly (I can statement)". This goal relates to the following core competencies:

- Positive Personal and Cultural Identity (building relationships)
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility (self-regulation)
- Social Responsibility (contributing to the community and solving problems peacefully)

When teachers identify the expectations for all students, when they teach and reinforce the specific skills, and nurture the skills through having students self-assess how they are doing, it makes developing personal and social core competency become within the grasp of all students. The development of school-wide behaviour expectations creates a practical way for teachers to foster the personal and social core competency areas that promote the healthy development of students' social-emotional skills, so essential to successful relationships and purpose in school and the world beyond.

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Reference

1 <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies>

A group of educational leaders were asked the question, "What is your must-read title for new teachers?" These are some of their suggestions.

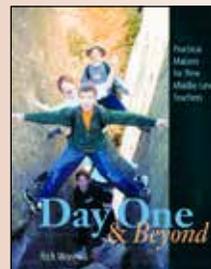


The Daily 5, Second Edition

by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser

The Daily 5, Second Edition, retains the core literacy components that made the first edition one of the most widely read books in education, and enhances these practices based on years of further experience in classrooms and compelling new brain research. *The Daily 5* provides a way for any teacher to structure literacy and math time to increase

student independence and allow for individualized attention in small groups and one-on-one.

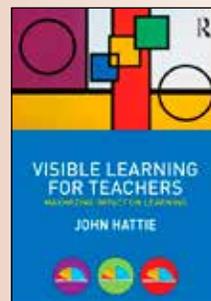


Day One and Beyond: Practical Matters for New Middle-level Teachers

by Rick Wormeli

As well as sound advice on practical survival matters, classroom management, and social issues in the middle school, this thoughtful book also provides insight into common concerns, proven best practices, and teaching tips — from how to handle physical and emotional issues, to managing discipline, to

relating well to both students and parents.

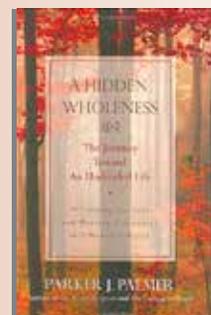


Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning

by John Hattie

Written for students, pre-service and in-service teachers, this book links the biggest ever research project on teaching strategies to practical classroom implementation. It explores how to apply the principles of *Visible Learning* to any classroom anywhere in the world. The author offers concise and user-friendly summaries of the

most successful interventions and offers practical step-by-step guidance to the successful implementation of visible learning and visible teaching in the classroom.



A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life

by Parker J. Palmer

The same compassionate intelligence that shaped Parker Palmer's best-selling books *Let Your Life Speak* and *The Courage to Teach* is at work here as he speaks to our yearning to live undivided lives – lives that are congruent with our inner truth – in a world filled with the forces of fragmentation. *A Hidden Wholeness* weaves together four themes that

its author has pursued for forty years: the shape of an integral life, the meaning of community, teaching and learning for transformation, and nonviolent social change.

NEWS AND EVENTS



The 18th annual SCSBC Leadership Conference for Christian school boards and administrative teams will be held on Saturday, November 4, 2017, at Surrey Christian School. We look forward to welcoming Zach Clark as our keynote presenter. Zach was our guest speaker at the 2016 Business and Development conference, and we have maintained a close working relationship with him since then; he clearly has a heart for the

work of Christian schools. The second plenary session will be an introduction to the work of policy development committee on the newly developed *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Matrix, a guide for our schools*.

The day includes a catered lunch and a concise look at the workings of SCSBC through our Annual General Meeting, followed by a choice of afternoon workshops. If you are involved in the mission of Christian education, mark your calendar. You will not want to miss this event.



Zach Clark

SAVE THE DATE

November 4, 2017

SCSBC Leadership Conference and Annual General Meeting at Surrey Christian School

Keynote Speaker:
Zach Clark

March 6-7, 2018

SCSBC Business and Development Conference at Cedar Springs, Sumas

Keynote Speaker:
Rod Wilson

September 26-28, 2018

Christian Schools Canada

Conference 2018

hosted by OACS

at the Ottawa Marriott

Keynote speakers:

Jennifer Keesmaat

Sylvia Keesmaat



Another 40th Anniversary

Plans for a celebration on Saturday, November 4, 2017, are underway as Cedars Christian School prepares to mark its 40th year of Christian education in Prince George. All are welcome to enjoy the catered breakfast, open house, fair games and an evening service to remember God's faithfulness over the past four decades. For details, see the school website: www.cedars.bc.ca.

SCSBC's Information and Communication Technologies Pro-D



ICT-enabled learning environments are part of the current BC curriculum modernization which states that students need opportunities to develop the competencies required to use current and emerging technologies effectively in all aspects of their learning and life. To support ICT leaders, teachers, and administrators in this area, SCSBC offered a professional development day in April, and due to high demand, again in May. Immersive experi-

ence with Spheros, Drones, Lego Mindstorms, Osmos, 3D and Vinyl printers, and green screening technology let educators learn through challenge-based play and experience the drive behind maker spaces and computational thinking. Cloverdale Christian School hosted us, and as this photo shows, the students also were fascinated by the technology.



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