



# PRINCIPAL Connections

• Winter 2014 • Volume 18 • Issue 2

*Inclusion*

*Generosity*

*Giving*

*Respect*

## COMMUNICATION



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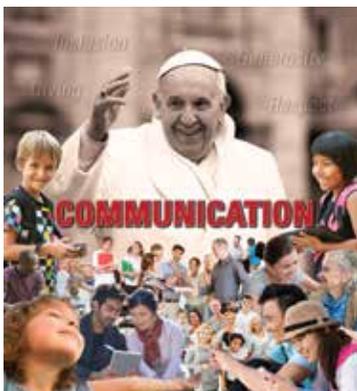
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## ON THE COVER

### Communication

Collage by Ania Czupajlo

The cover was inspired by Pope Francis' recent speech. He said that, "communicating is giving; communicating is generosity; communicating is respect; communicating is avoiding every kind of discrimination."  
~ Vatican News, September 5, 2014

**EDITOR**  
Deirdre Kinsella Biss

**ART DIRECTOR**  
Ania Czupajlo

**ADVERTISING & SALES**  
John Nijmeh  
Gaby Aloï

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
Fr. Santo Arrigo, Dr. Daniel Becker, Dr. Katherine Becker, Glenda L. Black, Anne Burke, Maria Cantalini-Williams, Helen J. DeWaard, Susan E. Elliott-Johns, Mary Fiore, Bill Gartland, Dr. Avis Glaze, Jenny Guibert, Janette Hughes, Melissa Jean, Ann Kajander, Debbie Kasman, Dr. Kateryna Keefer, Patrick Keyes, Maria Luisa Lebar, Jody Anne McDonald, Dr. Mark G. McGowan, Michelle Morrissey, Jan Murphy, Megan Murphy, Paul Nalli, Aggie Nemes, Dr. James D. A. Parker, Colleen Sharen, Carol Soper, Joan Tschernow, Dawn-Marie Wemigwans, Ron Wideman, Laura Wood, Doreen Scott-Dunne, Clint Young

## CPCO TEAM

- Pam Garbutt**, President  
president@cpco.on.ca | ext. 22
- Paul Lacalamita**, Executive Director  
placalamita@cpco.on.ca | ext. 23
- Joe Geiser**, Protective Services Coordinator  
jgeiser@cpco.on.ca | ext. 34
- Ron McNamara**, Protective Services Assistant Coordinator  
rmcnamara@cpco.on.ca | ext. 27
- Luciana Cardarelli**, Program & Member Services Coordinator  
lcardarelli@cpco.on.ca | ext. 37
- Terry Simzer**, Communications Manager  
tsimzer@cpco.on.ca | ext. 38
- Deirdre Kinsella Biss**, Editor  
dkinsellabiss@cpco.on.ca
- Gaby Aloï**, Manager of Corporate Operations  
galoi@cpco.on.ca | ext. 26
- Vanessa Kellow**, Professional Learning Assistant  
vkellow@cpco.on.ca | ext. 31
- Maria Cortez**, Administrative Assistant  
mcortez@cpco.on.ca | ext. 32
- Bessy Valerio**, Receptionist  
bvalerio@cpco.on.ca | ext. 21
- Ania Czupajlo**, Sr. Designer  
aczupajlo@cpco.on.ca | ext. 25
- Stephanie Zakhem**, Communications Officer  
szakhem@cpco.on.ca | ext. 30
- John Nijmeh**, Advertising Manager  
events@cpco.on.ca | ext. 28

We thank all those who contributed to this issue. Please note, however, that the opinions and views expressed are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of CPCO. Similarly, the acceptance of advertising does not imply CPCO endorsement.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40035635

## CONTACT US

Catholic Principals' Council | Ontario  
Box 2325, Suite 3030, 2300 Yonge Street  
Toronto, Ontario M4P 1E4

1.888.621.9190 toll free • 416.483.1556 phone  
416.483.2554 fax • info@cpco.on.ca  
[www.cpco.on.ca](http://www.cpco.on.ca)



**Dr. Avis Glaze**  
Edu-quest International Inc.

# Communication

## *the Essence of Leadership*

*As educational leaders, you are strategically positioned to shape the direction of education and of society as a whole. You are a powerful influence in the lives of students, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, sensibilities and character attributes necessary for responsible and engaged citizenship. You are responsible for creating safe havens, caring and demanding learning cultures, and effective schools that emphasize both excellence and equity. You create the conditions for success in teaching, learning and student achievement, and you engage parents and communities in meaningful ways to support learning. With all that you make happen in your schools, you also serve as leaders in your communities.*

To accomplish all of these expectations, principals must possess outstanding communication skills. Strong communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, are important components of effective leadership. These skills are often described as *soft skills*. But in leadership, the soft skills are often the hard skills to learn and demonstrate. These soft skills include, but are not limited to, the ability to demonstrate:

- Positive regard
- Active listening
- Empathic understanding
- Meaningful questioning
- Respectful assertiveness
- Constructive confrontation
- Effective feedback
- Willingness to accept criticism

While these aspects of effective communication are important, I encourage principals not underestimate the importance of non-verbal communication. All leaders should take steps to obtain feedback from a trusted colleague on their non-verbal styles and to understand how these styles affect the people they lead. The old saying “your actions speak so loudly I can hardly hear what you are saying” is a message that principals should bear in mind.

As a young administrator, my strategy was to select a few people whose opinions I trusted and valued and to ask them for feedback on all aspects of my behaviour. This required the ability to listen without interrupting or without the “Yes, but...” that often demonstrates an unwillingness to accept criticism. Accepting criticism without defensiveness is an important interpersonal skill.

I remember being told that my *resting face* made me appear to be angry. I was frankly not aware of this. I went home and tried to observe my *resting face* in the mirror. I was not happy with what I saw. I have never forgotten that feedback and how it contributed to my personal growth and self-awareness.

Good communication also equals good public relations. The two are inextricably linked.

One of my colleagues, Dr. Jim Watt, had a background in both marketing and education. He stressed the point that the public has a right to know as a fundamental premise of good public relations. For him, public relations is not the same as parent relations, nor is it about dispensing information or simply dealing in positives. He emphasized that it is not merely publicity, nor propaganda, nor the generation of a cosmetic effect. Instead, public relations involve three things – the ability to create and foster: dialogue; access; and involvement.



**Debbie Kasman**, Author  
*Lotus of the Heart*

# Mindfulness in Education

**W**e live in a stress-filled world. Our modern lifestyle contains media exposure and a great deal of high pressure. This constantly triggers the fight or flight response and keeps our bodies filled with stress hormones.

Dr. Patricia Jennings, Director of the Initiative on Contemplation and Education at the Garrison Institute in New York, maintains that it's hard for children to learn when they are under too much stress. Stressed-out children have difficulty engaging the prefrontal cortex in the brain, which makes it difficult for them to absorb and process new information. She also says that exposure to stress can trigger emotional reactivity during childhood development. This can have a long-term effect because it changes the way children's brains and bodies respond to future stressors.

As the result of our stress-filled world, many children come to school with nervous systems that are *unprepared to learn*.

# FOREVER FOR EVERYONE

## The Digital Communication Lesson We Should Teach Students

Children learn best by experiencing certain digital communication lessons for themselves. Performing a Google search for information is a lesson best experienced. Conversely, other digital communication lessons should be explicitly taught. Learning that privacy in digital communication is an illusion and that digital content has permanency are understandings that school administrators and educators can explicitly teach children to help them avoid the pain of having sensitive digital content shared indefinitely with unintended viewers.

Statistical trends indicate that more children are gaining access to the Internet, are starting to use the Internet at younger ages, and are spending more time on the Internet than ever before (Directorate for Science, Technology and Industry, 2011). A recent classroom-based survey by MediaSmarts (2014) of 5,436 students in Grades 4 to 11 across Canada revealed:

- 99% of students reported accessing the Internet outside of school (through computers, MP3 players, cell/smart phone and/or game consoles).
- 24% of Grade 4 students reported having their own cell phone. Percentages increased until Grade 11, in which 85% had their own phone.
- 38% of respondents reported using networked tools to post their own artwork or stories.
- 33% reported posting audio or video clips online.
- 32% of students in Grades 4-6 reported having a Facebook account in spite of age restrictions in its usage agreement. This percentage increased with grade level, until Grade 11, in which 95% had their own Facebook account.
- 16% of students in Grades 4-6 reported having a Twitter account. The percentage increased to 67% in Grade 11.
- 52% reported reading or posting on someone else's social network site as their most frequent online activity.

These findings indicate that not only are young Canadians using digital devices to access information, they are also actively offering personal information. Despite the prevalence of digital communication among students, just 41% of respondents reported learning about online issues (privacy, cyber bullying, offensive content, online safety and legality) from teachers (MediaSmarts, 2014).

### Digital Communication in the Curriculum

The Ontario Language Curriculum encourages educators to foster students' digital participation. By Grade 8, students produce a variety of media texts, such as multimedia presentations, videos and websites (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The curriculum is infused with digital literacy education; interpreting media texts using overt and implied messages as evidence and identifying the point of view reflected in media texts are two examples. This critical thinking about media texts, especially in regard to digital communication, is an important component of our evolving curriculum, but students would also benefit from learning about the ethics, etiquette and impact of digital communication from an early age. Administrators and educators can take the lead in fostering one essential understanding in particular.

# The 4 Roles of the Numerate Learner

Teaching and learning in the 21st century – *the now* – is multi-faceted, in that we need students to become skilled critical thinkers, thoughtful problem solvers and reflective communicators. To achieve this vision, teachers strive to create a connected classroom culture; one that is built on trust and mutual respect, where students are able to ask questions, pose problems, explore ideas and make informed decisions. Building capacity for connectedness supports an environment that is empowering and engaging, where students are meaningfully involved, where relevance is key and where their voice matters. Principals and teachers share responsibility in establishing such a culture.

## The way forward...

The goal of a professional learning community is to create a democratic learning environment with critical thinking at the forefront, where we build success for all students. To do this, we need to consider and question the status quo and question our current understanding of literacy and numeracy. Freire (1998) states, “I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning.”

As co-authors, we tried to make sense of linking critical literacy to critical numeracy, and decided that we had to begin by clearly defining our thinking. Our conversation began by exploring the fine differences among *Literacy*, *New Literacies* and *Critical Literacy*, recognizing that they are conceptually integrated. Critical literacy goes one step further than basic literacy. Critical literacy asks students to question the authority of texts and identify and examine the author’s bias or perspective, and then to engage in dialogue and discourse about text, relating it to their daily lives and their own point of view. It also examines writing as power.

At the same time, we examined the interconnectedness between *Mathematical Knowledge*, *Numeracy* and *Critical Numeracy*. We used our thinking about critical literacy to build our understanding of critical numeracy.

The goal of mathematics teaching for the 21st century – *the now* – is to support the development of a numerate learner. The focus is on numeracy and its relationship to mathematics. Numeracy and mathematics share an inherent relationship. On the one hand, skills like critical thinking and problem solving, applying technology and understanding data require a solid grounding in mathematical skills and concepts. On the other hand, knowledge of mathematical skills and concepts alone is not enough to guarantee numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2012). Numeracy, like literacy, must permeate across all subject areas. When this happens, Steen (2001) states, “it will enhance students’ understanding of all subjects and their capacity to lead informed lives.”

Our vision of mathematics teaching for the 21st century extends beyond the numerate learner to include the critically-numerate learner. A critically-numerate learner recognizes that mathematics used in practical situations has the potential to be politically and morally loaded (Stroessiger, 2002). Critical numeracy goes one step further than basic numeracy. Critical numeracy asks students to question the source(s) of mathematical information.

## A new entry point...

Recognizing the meaningful links between critical literacy and critical numeracy, we developed a thinking framework to provide a new entry point to mathematics instruction. This framework is intended to be a way of thinking – *a new way of thinking about mathematics and a new way of doing mathematics*. We adapted the Four Role Resource Model (Luke & Freebody, 2004) and the *Four Roles of the Literate Learner* (Ministry of Education, 2004) through our thinking process to develop the Four Roles of the Numerate Learner. The *Four Roles of the Numerate Learner* is a springboard to approach mathematics with new eyes. Questions to support the development of the numerate learner have been incorporated.

The Four Roles of the Numerate Learner are not intended to be linear or hierarchical. They are interconnected, support integrative thinking, and provide multiple entry points for learners. The intent is for learners to engage in critical thinking about numeracy.

## This framework matters...

Unless, as teachers and principals, we fully understand the complex roles of the numerate learner, we will be unable to create or foster an environment where students can make sense of mathematics, apply it to everyday contexts and use it to question numbers in their world. Our goal in the use of this framework would be to engage students to not only think critically about mathematics but to act on this knowledge to transform a situation.

As principals encourage students and teachers to become familiar with these four roles, there are multiple opportunities for student voice. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions, pose problems, explore ideas and change their thinking about mathematics and the way they see themselves as mathematicians. As we foster and support the integration of these four roles as part of our daily practice, we can be confident that it will enable students to utilize their diverse identities to build their mathematical knowledge and incorporate their cultural experiences to expand the current dialogue.

# FEEDBACK



## Is it Better to Give than Receive?

### “Can I give you some feedback?”

We’ve all heard this question. After close to 30 years in the work world, I still hate receiving feedback. (Okay, let’s be honest, I hate receiving negative feedback.) I often feel that I’ve just been emotionally ambushed. This is because, at least in part, I didn’t know how to receive and use feedback.

Feedback is only useful when it results in positive professional change. It is a tool that administrators can use to suggest specific actions, reveal blind spots, or help the recipient prioritize actions. If feedback is caring, respectful, specific, and fits with the recipient’s goals, it can be helpful. Feedback that doesn’t meet these criteria can result in defensive reactions and dismissal of valid criticism.

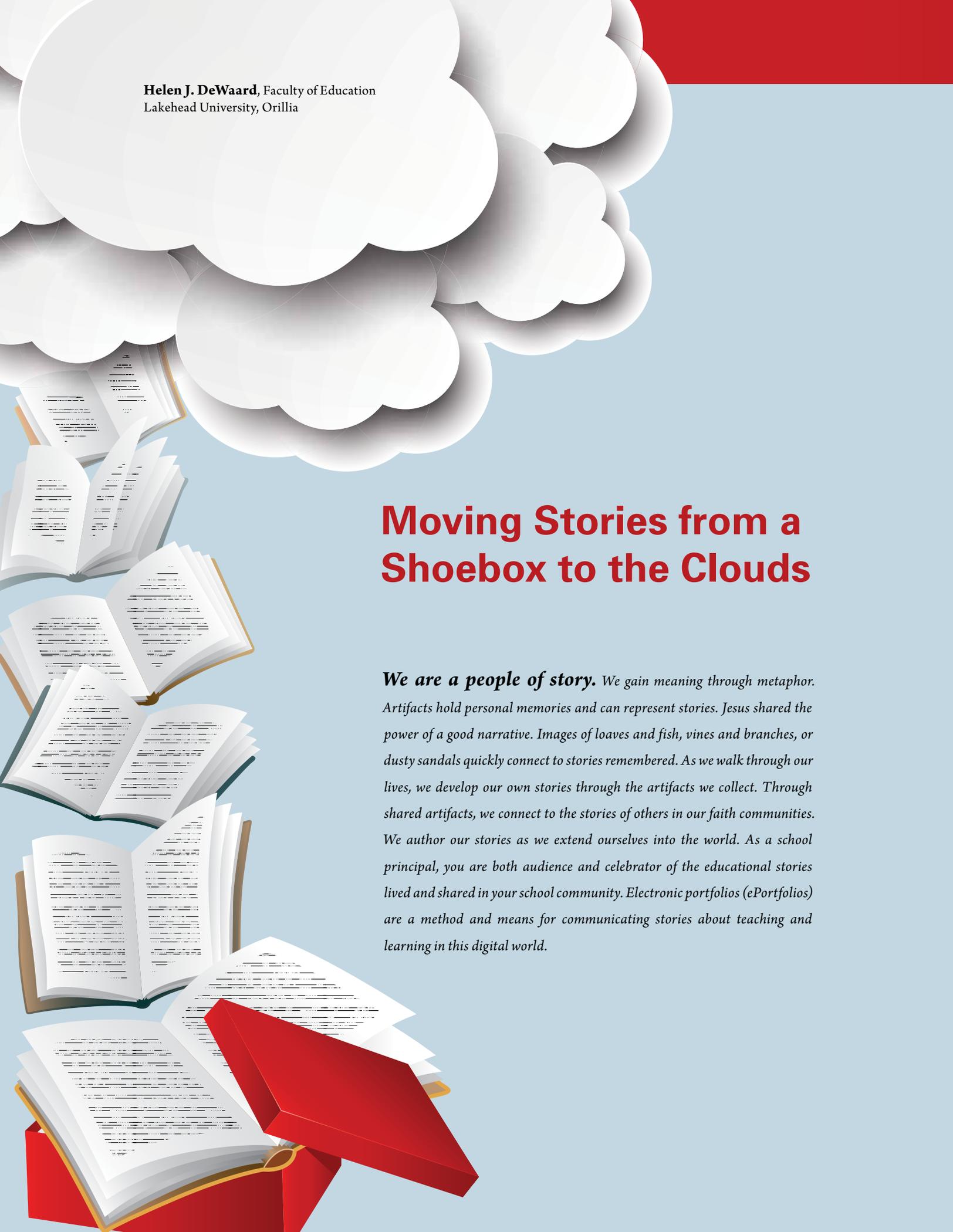
Sometimes leaders get too little feedback, as their staff chooses to avoid communicating negative comments. This is sometimes called the “mum effect.” The mum effect limits the development of leaders. No one wants to tell the emperor that he is wearing no clothes. Feedback can be valuable for people who want to improve their performance, but only if the process is intentional. To get the most out of feedback, follow these five steps:

1. **Assess Readiness**
2. **Plan**
3. **Collect**
4. **Reflect**
5. **Act**

## 1 Assessing Readiness

In this phase, it is important to determine if you are ready for feedback. First, assess whether you are emotionally able to hear feedback. Dealing with personal, family or health issues that take up emotional bandwidth, may mean that you may not be able to handle feedback. We cycle through times when we are open to change, and other times when we are consolidating previous changes in our lives, and are therefore not open to change and feedback.

Second, determine if you are approaching the feedback process with a growth mindset. Your openness to learning, changing and growing improves the likelihood that feedback will be processed and acted upon. So you need to be honest about whether you are ready for change. All the feedback in the world will not improve performance if you aren’t open to it.



**Helen J. DeWaard**, Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University, Orillia

## Moving Stories from a Shoebox to the Clouds

***We are a people of story.** We gain meaning through metaphor. Artifacts hold personal memories and can represent stories. Jesus shared the power of a good narrative. Images of loaves and fish, vines and branches, or dusty sandals quickly connect to stories remembered. As we walk through our lives, we develop our own stories through the artifacts we collect. Through shared artifacts, we connect to the stories of others in our faith communities. We author our stories as we extend ourselves into the world. As a school principal, you are both audience and celebrator of the educational stories lived and shared in your school community. Electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) are a method and means for communicating stories about teaching and learning in this digital world.*

Jan Murphy, Aggie Nemes, Carol Soper,  
Joan Tschernow, Patrick Keyes  
Toronto Catholic District School Board



***How Can I  
Help You?***

## Enhancing Home-School Communication

*What is it, then, that helps us, in the digital environment, to grow in humanity and mutual understanding? We need, for example, to recover a certain sense of deliberateness and calm. This calls for time and the ability to be silent and to listen. We need also to be patient if we want to understand those who are different from us. People only express themselves fully when they are not merely tolerated, but know that they are truly accepted. If we are genuinely attentive in listening to others, we will learn to look at the world with different eyes and come to appreciate the richness of human experience as manifested in different cultures and traditions.*

Pope Francis, 48th World Communications Day,  
June 1, 2014

Communicating effectively with parents, especially those who had negative experiences with school, is a critical part of an administrator's day. As studies have shown, parents who feel welcome and participate fully in their child's school experience have a positive impact on student achievement and well-being.

### **An Important Lesson**

Part of the welcome involves knowing the story of the parent and remembering that words do matter. I learned an important lesson on my first day as a vice-principal when I walked into the office and witnessed an angry confrontation between the secretary and a parent. In order to de-escalate the situation, I invited the parent into my office to find out what was happening. What I learned helped shape all my future encounters with parents. The secretary had insisted on referring to the parent by the last name of her child, even though the data card showed that she went by a different name. Through her tears, the mother explained that the father of the child was in jail for abusing her. While her son shared the abuser's name, she did not want to be called by that name. I was touched that she shared this critical piece of information and made sure to correct the situation with the secretary.

From that day on, whenever meeting with parents or setting the agenda for School-Based Support Team or Joint Team meetings, I was sure to verify the names (and relationships) of the adults attending. In our diverse school, I also came to realize the value of asking parents about correct pronunciation; they always appreciated the effort and the



**Ann Kajander**, Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON

## SUPPORTING MATHEMATICS CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

# *Challenges for Educators*

This is the second in a series of articles aimed at describing the challenges educators face as they strive to effectively implement the Ontario Math Curriculum. Educators' deep and flexible content knowledge plays an important role in building effective learning environments. The recent publication *Mathematical knowledge for teaching: Reasoning without memorization* (Kajander & Boland, 2014) supports classroom-specific learning of mathematics by both teachers and principals. This article will explore an example of what it means to understand mathematics deeply enough for teaching, and what effect such knowledge can have on the success of a classroom lesson.

### The Need for Specialized Mathematics Knowledge

Principals need to increase their own knowledge of mathematics. Developing math knowledge and understanding provides instructional leaders with the insight necessary to effectively observe classroom lessons and support classroom teaching. Principals can enter more freely into dialogue with teachers when they are comfortable with their own content knowledge.

### A Case Study

A teacher is leading a review lesson. It appears to have many of the features of a "good" mathematics lesson. The use of interactive technology is evident. Contextual practice questions to which students are asked to respond are offered on an interactive whiteboard. After the students try each question themselves, a student is called upon to click the board to verify the answer, which is also displayed visually. The students all appear involved and engaged. But while the lesson appears to be effective, a subtle issue with the mathematical interpretation later actually derails the lesson for some students.

### Specialized Mathematic Knowledge

In this example lesson, all the questions resulted in single-step division problems, and all the contexts involved the "equal-sharing" interpretation of division. [The "equal-sharing" or *partitive* model of division involves questions of the type "Six cakes were to be equally divided between two groups, how many cakes did each get?"] In equal-sharing problems, the answer refers to the number *in* each group. [Each group gets *three* cakes.] It should be noted however, that a *second* important model or interpretation

of division, sometimes called the *measurement* model, was *not* offered in the examples in the lesson. [A "measurement" model of division would be used to answer a problem such as "Eight slices of bread were used for sandwiches. Each sandwich used two slices of bread. How many sandwiches were made?"]. In measurement problems, the answer refers to the *number* of groups (not the size of each). [In the sandwiches question, the number of groups – sandwiches in this case – is *four*.] It might be expected then, in this sample lesson, that many of the students would choose to think of the "equal sharing" model during their independent work, since that is what they had just reviewed in all the white board questions.

Continuing with the vignette, the first independent follow-up question the children were asked to do was to draw a picture, using dots, of  $12 \div 6$ . We might expect children using the equal-sharing model to think of splitting the amount into "6 groups", and draw:



Figure 1. The equal sharing model

Two boys approached the teacher with the model shown in Figure 2:



Figure 2. The boys' model

The boys' diagram uses the measurement interpretation of division (the "how many 6's in 12" idea), which was not present in the review. Next, a pair of girl students approached the teacher. Their work (see Figure 3) looked like the previous (Figure 1) model of equal sharing.



Figure 3. The girls' model, showing equal sharing

The teacher then took a pen and "corrected" the girls' work to show two groups of six, to illustrate the  $12 \div 6$  (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The teacher's model

The teacher's correction used the measurement model, or "how many 6's are in 12" interpretation, while the girls' work had followed the white board examples, all of which used the model of equal sharing. While both

## Mental Health

# Creating a Stigma-Free Zone

The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario has been deeply involved with mental health for our students and staff for some time. Last spring, we paused as a school board to celebrate the work we have accomplished when we were presented with the Mood Disorders Society of Canada's Jordan James Pickell Mental Health Achievement Award. It recognizes the significant steps forward we have taken in raising the awareness of mental health issues.

Our approach to mental health has not been by accident. Our strategies are deliberate and calculating to ensure that we are reaching those in need and those who are vulnerable. These strategies are integrated in what we do each and every day. To reach out to those in need or for those in need to reach out for help, it is imperative that the entire system be comfortable talking about mental health without fear of stigma. By frequently speaking to the topic and issues, individuals have become more confident. They know where assistance is available.

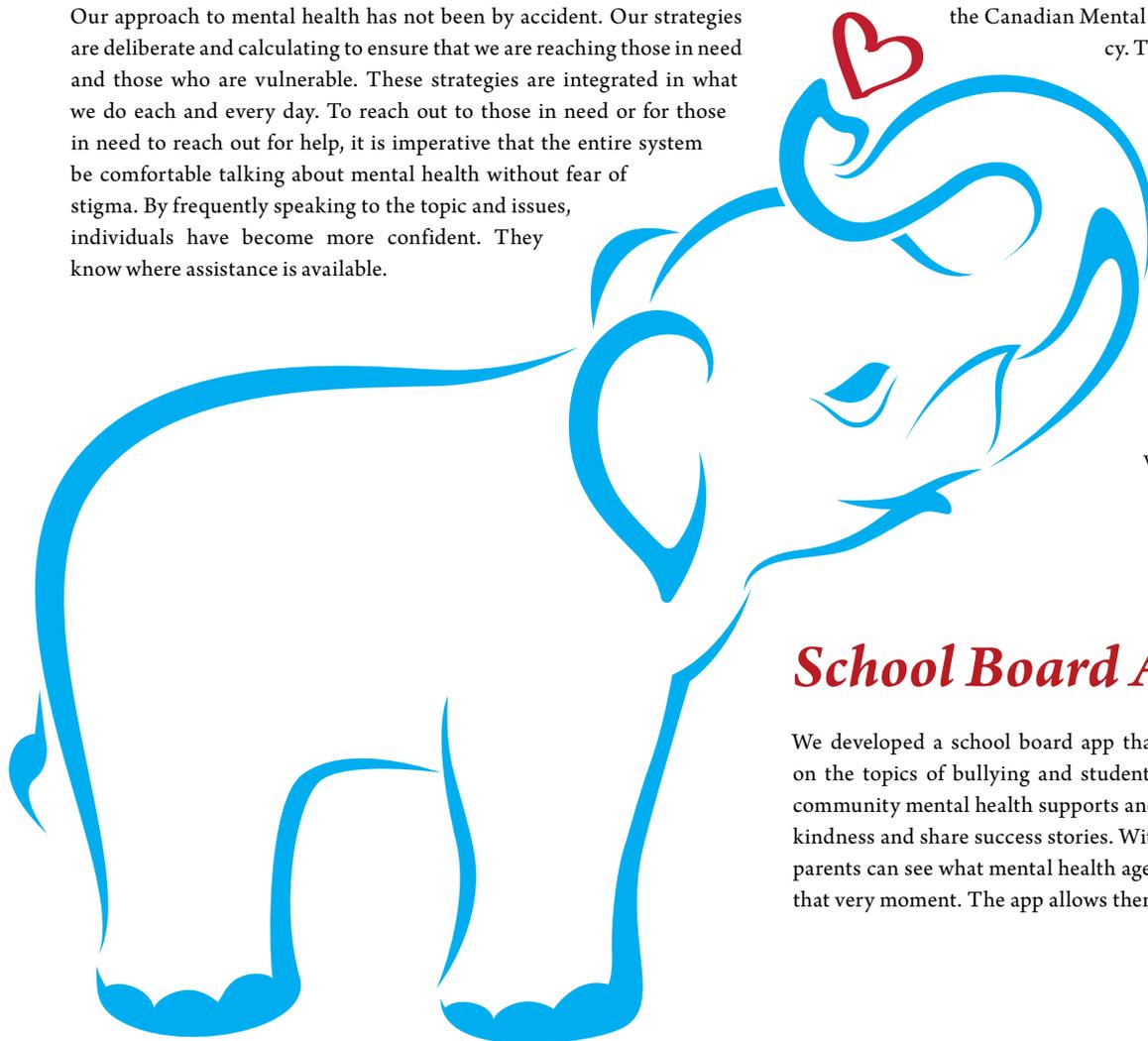
The following are some of the strategies that have been helpful in developing a positive approach to mental health.

### *Policy*

We have made a firm statement regarding mental health in our system by being one of the first school boards in Canada to incorporate the Canadian Mental Health Standard in our board policy. This policy established an Employee Mental Health and Wellness Committee, which consists of all employee groups focused on the development, implementation and continued improvement of a healthy and safe work environment. Through a variety of strategies, they advise our school system on how to foster mental wellness, dialogue and education including early intervention and support.

### *School Board App*

We developed a school board app that allows students to find support on the topics of bullying and student safety. It also provides access to community mental health supports and the opportunity to report acts of kindness and share success stories. With a quick click, students, staff and parents can see what mental health agencies and supports are available at that very moment. The app allows them to call, text or email information





# SUPPORTING MENTAL WELL-BEING FOR STUDENTS, ADULTS AND SELF

April 23-25, 2015

Westin Harbour Castle  
Toronto, ON

**Registration Opens in February**  
Register before March 9, 2015 to receive our Early Bird Discount!



## Dr. Ian Manion

Be part of an inspirational address by Dr. Ian Manion, Executive Director for the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. Actively involved in research in the areas of parent/child interactions, community mental health promotion, youth depression and suicide, Dr. Manion will highlight the "one degree" difference that we can make in life and leadership.



## Richard Wagamese

Listen to Richard Wagamese – writer, teacher and our keynote speaker - share his story. As one of Canada's most successful and awarded Aboriginal authors, journalists and broadcasters, he is a survivor of childhood abuse and its associated trauma. Richard's frank, open, spiritual and enlightening talk tells the story of his disappearance as a victim of The 60s Scoop and the abuse he suffered in non-native foster homes and an adopted home. He speaks of alcoholism, homelessness, cultural displacement and shame, incarceration and how all of these things manifested themselves as a result of childhood trauma. With this empowering presentation, Richard outlines how Aboriginal people, and anyone suffering from PTSD, can learn to live fully and completely.

- **Hear from a panel of health and education experts as they discuss issues that you want to know about.**
- **Build and share knowledge, strategies and ideas about how, as Catholic leaders, we support mentally healthy learning communities for students and adults, through large and small group conversation.**
- **Leave the conference feeling recharged, renewed and reconnected with colleagues, knowing that we are never alone in our work, and together our Catholic leadership is stronger.**