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The Vulnerability Paradox

by Ed Noot

In his landmark book, *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer states that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”¹ One could similarly state that effective leadership is also much more than technique. Several authors have recently highlighted the importance of vulnerability and transparency in leadership. In fact, Brené Brown says that vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change.² Educational leaders today certainly need to be creative innovators who are able to embrace and initiate change.

Paradoxically, leaders also face high expectations to be strong, decisive and competent. These powerful but often unarticulated expectations can be key inhibitors to a posture of vulnerability. Brown points out that vulnerability is not weakness, although it can be viewed that way, but rather is courageous. She also points out that vulnerability involves a degree of risk and uncertainty. The challenge is to find the point of balance, the sweet spot, a place of healthy openness and what Palmer calls *relational trust*, or what Brown refers to as a place of connectedness and belonging.³

The vulnerability paradox is particularly acute when leaders are in a position of accountability – for example, a lead principal, school head or superintendent with a board; a campus principal with a superintendent; or a vice principal or teacher with a principal. Worry and fear over performance reviews can easily stifle a healthy level of vulnerability in such relationships.

The challenge with vulnerability is, of course, related to shame. Brené Brown highlights this in her TED Talk on shame, as does the Bible. In Genesis 3, we are told that after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked. Before that, the normative response to nakedness was comfort and openness. But sin distorts the response to discomfort, embarrassment and shame. The immediate response of Adam and Eve was to cover themselves, to hide themselves from God and from one another. Sadly, humanity has been erecting barriers to their true selves ever since.

The biblical narrative on a cosmic scale is the story of the Kingdom of God, but on a personal level it is a story of peeling back our masks to recover our true identity as sons and daughters of God. This is a complex but worthy pursuit.

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The Vulnerability Paradox

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Here are some examples of the vulnerability paradox:

- A leadership initiative did not achieve the expected results, but valuable lessons were learned that can help the school move forward, How does the leader frame this “failure” with the board?
- A leader is experiencing intense personal stress at home which is impacting the leader’s energy and ability to focus at work. Does the leader communicate this or hide it?
- A leader has had intensely negative personal interactions with a school parent who has just been suggested as a potential nominee to the board. Does the leader communicate this information or not?
- A school leader has served a community for twelve years and has been asked to apply for a job in an adjacent city. Does the leader tell their board, recognizing the risk of being viewed as not being committed to the current school?

Brené Brown gives compelling reasons for pursuing vulnerability as it moves us from a place of black and white to a place of some uncertainty and even mystery. It also creates space for failure and the learning that comes through failing. Lastly, she believes that being appropriately vulnerable:

- allows our true selves to be seen
- allows us to love with our whole hearts
- allows us to practice gratitude and joy

Indeed, she views vulnerability as the key to whole-hearted living and leading. Brown’s observations are enlightening, but her premise relies solely on human good will and ingenuity to reach the stated goal. How much more should the goal of attaining relational trust be pursued by communities who follow Christ – reconciliation incarnate.

Another author, Edgar Papke, in his book *The Elephant in the Boardroom*,⁴ also hails the benefit of coming to a place of relational trust. He writes about how the path to great organizational performance begins with mutual respect, and demonstrates this model in his diagram reproduced below.⁵

How can leaders foster an appropriate level of vulnerability to move to a place of relational trust? Here are some ideas:

- Create space for open conversation, perhaps one on one (board chair and educational leader) or in a small group.
- Meet regularly outside of board meetings – get to know one another personally, create a relationship built on openness trust and mutual respect.
- Model vulnerability one to another and talk openly about the challenges inherent in this process.
- Ask questions that open the door to vulnerability – what about your job gives you joy, energy and enthusiasm? What about your job drains you of joy, energy and enthusiasm?
- Protect vulnerability. Once trust is destroyed, it is very difficult to re-establish.

Vulnerability is a paradox indeed. If we want teachers and leaders to embody wholeness and integrity, I believe it is a paradox that is worth addressing.

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The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Dr. Rod Wilson, President Emeritus of Regent College for facilitating exploration of the concept of vulnerability and leadership as part of the Senior Leadership Enrichment Seminar, a two-year leadership development cohort provided by SCSBC for member school superintendents.

Mutual
Respect

Trust and
Openness

Mutual
Benefit

Team
Benefit

Organization-wide
Performance

Competitive
Advantage

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- 4 Papke, Edgar. *The Elephant in the Boardroom: How Leaders Use and Manage Conflict to Reach Greater Levels of Success*. Career Press, 2015.
- 5 Ibid, page 89.

Should Teachers Be Developing Their Core Competencies?

by Darren Spykma

For Christian educators, competency development as a focus for the BC Ed Plan is one of the most exciting and significant professional gifts they will receive. The present Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools, with support and leadership from the Ministry of Education, is modeling innovation and purposeful change. They are encouraging schools to design personalized learning for the unique students being educated. Even as we struggle to fully grasp all of the elements of the BC Ed Plan, we must celebrate and embrace this progressive stand for education in British Columbia and the rich potential it offers for us to better meet our mission.

Our deepest longing as Christian educators is to see students develop and grow to be faithful in both the small interactions each day and in the large decisions that will impact not only themselves but the lives of many others. This type of student development does not come from learning to spell a random list of words. The competency development we seek happens when our intermediate students are learning to spell words like *secondary* and *consumer* because they need to know these words. If they do not, how will they be able to intelligently discuss the local ecosystem restoration with a representative from Parks and Recreation? They need to know them because God has placed a call on their lives to be earth keepers and creation enjoyers.¹

When the purpose behind our learning aligns with our mission and the Curricular Competencies within the BC Ed Plan, then the learning that takes place will be in compliance with a focus on Core Competency development while also being formational. James K.A. Smith, in his book *You Are What You Love*,² reminds us that formational learning “isn’t just information acquisition; it’s more like inscribing something into the very fiber of your being” and goes on to explain that this type of learning only happens in two ways, imitation and practice. Schools have always been good at practice. I believe that for the most part, schools have also been good at providing models for imitation. But if what we are to practice and model in learning is changing, our professional development must follow suit.

If teachers are going to be able to plan for, assess and support the development of competency in their students, they must first become aware of competency development in their own life. This was one of the principles explored in the professional development course *Experiencing Christ in the Classroom*. Research from this course resulted in findings that support the importance of teacher competency development. One participant summed up his growth well as he reflected on his learning regarding the impact of pedagogy on faith formation when he said “I realized that in order to help my students in this area, I first needed to develop this area of myself.”³

As teachers explored the impact of pedagogy on faith formation, they came face to face with the reality that no matter what they are teaching, their personal development was essential to their ability to support learning.⁴

If Christian education is going to truly focus on faith formational competency development in students, teachers need to have opportunity to reflect on and act out of a desire to develop faith formational competency in their own lives. It would be a mistake on the part of all stakeholders if we were to assume teachers could support

If teachers are going to be able to plan for, assess and support the development of competency in their students, they must first become aware of competency development in their own life.

Should Teachers Be Developing Their

competency development without first reflecting on their own personal practice, and on how faith formation and competency development are lifelong processes – processes that Christian educators believe lead to a fuller realization of who God has created them to be.

For teachers to plan for competency development in a formational way, they must reflect on their own lives and how their communication, thinking, personal identity and social responsibility are developing in a faith formational way. Just as in student learning, competency development involves small conscious steps in a specific direction. This may involve smiling at strangers as you walk down the street or standing at the door of the classroom each day to address every student by name and with eye contact. It may involve researching where your food, coffee and clothing come from. Our schools are doing this already. Just this summer my family returned a beautiful and affordable table cloth because meaningful instruction and a purposeful project brought our son to understand the impact of child labour and where it was taking place in the world.

As teachers use a *group work* protocol to assist students in developing a heart for others, they are not only supporting critical thinking and social responsibility, they are fulfilling their mission. By including a prompt like, “Share with the presenter how they helped you as a learner through this project” in a *gallery walk* protocol, and modeling what

this looks like in the culture of feedback in the classroom, teachers are giving students something to imitate in terms of competency development; they are also giving students the opportunity to develop habits that are formational. By teaching students and having students practice giving feedback that focuses on collaboration rather than competition, they are assisting students in the creation of habits of empathy and service. A small change to an already strong pedagogy makes a significant impact in the lives of students.

Each pedagogical choice teachers make teaches a student what is important and what to value. The inherent benefit of a focus on intentional pedagogy chosen to support faith formation is the change in teacher thinking. Intentionally choosing a pedagogy for both educational value and an ability to reinforce elements of faith formation encourages teachers to reflect on regular classroom routines and how they shape students. As teachers choose pedagogies that encourage empathy, service, and discernment, they are choosing pedagogies that support competency development and faith formation.

As we continue to shape the BC Ed Plan in our own context, the easy path is to ignore the core competencies, choosing rather to go where we are comfortable – big ideas and knowledge. These elements are an important part of learning for students, but without an emphasis on competency development and why competency development

School Financial Report Cards

by Tim Williams

If you were to assess your school’s financial management, as compared to best practice, would you be able to give it a passing grade?

A school’s financial health can be demonstrated in very simple terms:

**Educational
Income**
(tuition and
grants)

–

**Educational
Expenses**
(including
depreciation)

=

**Education
Operational
Surplus**

If you were to read your school’s financial statements, would they provide an accurate picture of the true financial position of the school? Sometime this isn’t as clear as it could be due to common reporting errors such as:

- failing to account for depreciation of capital assets;
- including donations and fundraising as educational income i.e. not understanding the difference between a Society budget and Educational Operation budget; and
- not using the accrual accounting method i.e. not understanding the difference between cash and accruals basis of accounting.

SCSBC has a long history of advising schools to develop balanced budgets according to the simple best practice guidelines articulated above. Organizations that are unable or unwilling to develop balanced budgets are ultimately forced to commit the following financial bloopers:

- using donations to pay teachers salaries and other operational items;
- borrowing money from the overdraft to finance operational deficits;

Core Competencies?

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supports mission, schools will fail to fully take advantage of all the rich potential in the BC Ed Plan.

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- 1 Throughlines from the PCCE developed *Teaching for Transformation*
- 2 Smith, J. K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. 2016.
- 3 Gillespie, S and Spyksma, D. *Applying the Elements of Effective Professional Development to Increase the Implementation of Biblical Teaching Practices in the Classroom*. 2016.
- 4 Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: : Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1998.

Without an emphasis on competency development and why competency development supports mission, schools will fail to fully take advantage of all the rich potential in the BC Ed Plan.



- spending cash surpluses built up from previous decades;
- failing to set aside reserves to deal with replacement of assets that will definitely occur in the future.

If school leaders do not understand the financial position of the organization, they need to acquire this important skill. Leaders have an ethical and legal responsibility to learn about and understand financial management, and to be sure their schools are operated accordingly.

Administrators and board members who fail to promote financial best practice are potentially putting their school in a perilous long term financial situation. Repeated deficit operational budgets could impact a school's ability to maintain its programs into the future. It is simply not a sustainable model. As leadership is entrusted with looking into the future to chart an organizational course, the question of sustainability should be one that is considered regularly.

SCSBC objective is that all member schools would achieve an excellent report card in financial management. We offer advice, consultation and financial health audits to

help schools reach this position. When schools budget accordingly, they develop a reputation for wise stewardship of the resources they have been blessed to receive. Schools find that when their financial house is in order, it is much easier to approach potential donors or obtain a mortgage when large capital projects are required.

Every SCSBC school receives a detailed Financial Benchmark Report each year. School leaders, treasurers and boards are encouraged to analyze these results carefully and measure themselves against financial management best practice. SCSBC staff are available to assist member schools.

Leaders who take their fiduciary responsibilities seriously will want to ensure their school has a balanced educational budget for the coming year. This will allow schools to weather storms that may come (economic recession, for example) and ensure sustainable into the future, thereby meeting the mission of Christian education for generations to come.

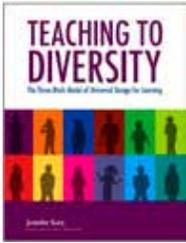
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is the SCSBC Director of Finance

RECOMMENDED

Check out these resources

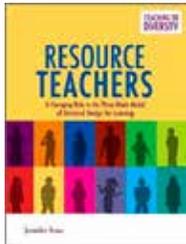
Addressing the

The Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning



Teaching to Diversity: The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning
by Jennifer Katz

Resource Teachers: A Changing Role in the Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning
by Jennifer Katz



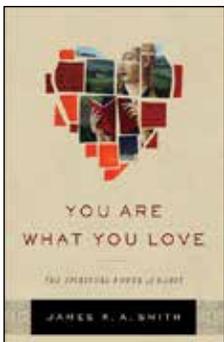
www.threeblockmodel.com/the-three-block-model-of-udl.html

Dr. Jennifer Katz created the Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which is now being implemented by school divisions across Canada as a framework for inclusive education. She graduated with a doctorate in Inclusive Education in 2008 from the University of British Columbia and recently moved from Manitoba,

where she was the Associate Professor of Inclusive Education. As of July 1, 2016, she is the Assistant Professor in Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia.

Brand new from James K. A. Smith

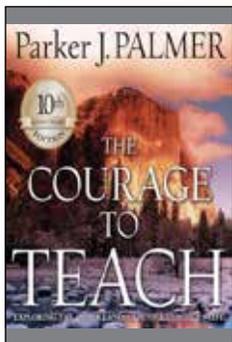
You Are What You Love *The Spiritual Power of Habit*



by James K. A. Smith

Who and what we worship fundamentally shape our hearts. And while we desire to shape culture, we are not often aware of how culture shapes us. Smith helps readers recognize the formative power of culture and the transformative possibilities of Christian practices. He creatively uses film, literature, and music illustrations to engage readers and includes new material on marriage, family, youth ministry, and faith and work. He also suggests individual and communal practices for shaping the Christian life. In this new

book, Smith offers a fresh, bottom-up rearticulation of the ideas in *Desiring the Kingdom*.



A classic to revisit or read for the first time

The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life
by Parker J. Palmer

Hundreds of thousands of readers have benefited from this book which takes teachers on an inner journey toward reconnecting with themselves, their students, their colleagues, and their vocations, and reclaiming their passion for one of the most challenging and important of human endeavors.

Good teaching takes myriad forms but good teachers share one trait: they are authentically present in the classroom, in community with their students and their subject. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts.

6

by Jenny Williams



Class size and composition has been a hotly contested topic. There are no easy answers when it comes to the realities of balancing budgets with teacher and student needs. One of the definitions used by the Ministry of Education for “class composition” is the number of students in a class who are entitled to an Individual Education Plan.¹ It is interesting when we compare this definition of composition in a classroom to those in other areas. For instance, in writing and art, composition means arranging elements in a piece of work. In music, composition refers to creating an original piece. In these fields, composition has a positive connotation of putting together pieces to create a creative whole.²

When it comes to class composition there has been a tendency to focus on the student’s deficits and difficulties rather than their strengths and abilities. How should we look at the question of class composition in Christian schools? We embrace all students as members of a divine creation in God’s image and we uphold the concept of inclusive education, where all students are valued members and contributors in a classroom. Effective teachers create learning opportunities for all students based on each student’s strengths and taking into account strategies that work well for each student and the class as a whole.

What is an effective way for teachers to identify and harness student strengths? SCSBC is seeking to adapt a version of Brownlie and King’s “Class Review”³ to assist teachers with creating digital student and class profiles. These have a positive focus on the strengths and interests of the students as well as strategies that

Classroom Composition Debate

work for the students and any challenges are referred to as “stretches”. This term “stretches” gives the connotation of being changeable and temporary, rather than being seen as permanent global weaknesses. It normalizes the fact that all students have both strengths and stretches and focuses teachers on developing student potential and looking for growth in all their students. Several teachers and special education coordinators from Abbotsford Christian School participated in a pilot project in June 2016, to examine the effectiveness and some of the benefits of using this class review template for creating student and class learning profiles. After receiving the report of their class profile, some of the teachers commented:

- It was a valuable time to reflect on each student and their God-given gifts and abilities.
- The class snapshot showed which strategies and supports the students in my class need.
- It helped me notice where there were groups of students linked together with a common interest, strength or stretch.
- I have a wonderful reference for communicating with and reporting to parents.

We are seeking ways that the class profiles may provide helpful information for teachers about what works for students. Moreover, we are examining how they could be used to help schools make decisions about allocating resources to classes and teachers, allocating students to classes and communicating valuable information for teachers from one year to the next. We trust that this approach will help both students and adults to understand that we all have “stretches”, that we can all benefit from the strengths of others, and that we can work together to bring out the best in each other.

Jenny Williams (jenny.williams@scsbc.ca) is the SCSBC Director of Educational Support Services

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NEWS AND EVENTS

Recognizing that the new BC Ed Plan requires understanding of Aboriginal content and perspectives, staff of Bulkley Valley Christian School in Smithers spent a day learning about their Wet'suwet'en neighbours. More importantly, staff were motivated by a sense of biblical justice and reconciliation with the Aboriginal community that is based on humility. The Blanket exercise was an especially moving demonstration of the effects of colonization. Hearing first hand from Aboriginal speakers of the effects of the loss of their culture, then taking a field trip to traditional Wet'suwet'en territory with a local anthropologist provided a shared experience that will help shape the implementation of the new curriculum at BVCS.



The 2015/16 BC School Sports Provincial Coach of the Year Award went to Jack Boersma who has been a teacher at Abbotsford Christian School for 36 years. This award honours a teacher who has made an outstanding contribution over an extended period of time to coaching athletic programs in the secondary schools of British Columbia. Jack is recognized for his strong character and values as well as for leading excellent programs. Jack uses his gifts and talents to benefit students, the school community and the athletic community in BC. He promotes the philosophy of fair play and sportsmanship, and uses athletics to help grow, build, and mold young men and women.

SCSBC introduced the Constitution and Bylaws Revision Guide last year at the Leadership Conference. As the new Societies Act of BC comes into effect, this document has been a support to our member school societies as well as other societies in the province. In this photo, Ken Volkenant, SCSBC board member and lawyer, is presenting a webcast on the topic to the Associate Member Group of FISA schools.



SCSBC staff members met with a group of educators and consultants from the Netherlands in May, 2016. This group was on an exploratory tour for their project to research what they term as "entrepreneurial education" – a competency-based approach to learning.

SAVE THE DATE

September 21-23, 2016
Christian Schools Canada
Conference 2016

at the Banff Conference
Centre, hosted by PCCE

Keynote speaker:
Andy Crouch

November 5, 2016

SCSBC Leadership
Conference and
Annual General Meeting
at
Surrey Christian School

Keynote Speaker:
Beth Green

March 7-8, 2017

SCSBC Business and
Development Conference
at
Cedar Springs, Sumas



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