



INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION

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The LINK

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Robert Koole
DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM
koole@twu.ca

Learning is a Prayerful Process

PRAYER IS . . .

an act in which we open ourselves to God's presence, break up our hard hearts to receive the refreshing shower of God's grace. Prayer is the practice by which we allow ourselves to receive God's gifts, to be embraced by Christ's love, to be filled with the life of the Spirit.

Dan Postema, 1977.
Space for God, p. 12
Grand Rapids, MI: CRC
Publications

I can still remember the worry. I can still remember the stress. It was 1964 and I was of one of the Grade 12 students asked to give a chapel speech. In those days, that meant a mini-sermon about 15 -20 minutes long.

The high school I attended had set up a monthly rotation: a pastor one week, a teacher the next week, a guest speaker the next, and a senior student the fourth week. Can you imagine that—giving students a chance to inspire the rest of the school with their thoughts about what the Bible means to them? On the one hand, we felt that being senior students it was high time teachers asked us; on the other hand, we were scared stiff of what our student colleagues would think about what we said.

As the day came closer, I became more and more worried and looked for every possible reason to avoid actually giving the chapel speech. At the same time, deep inside I had a clear sense of what I felt was important to share. The school motto at the time—*ora et labore* (pray and work)—provided a theme that resonated with my own upbringing and with my personal experiences at the time. I used Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7-8 as the theme of the chapel service.



Reflecting on that experience, I realize that all learning is very much a prayerful process. Yet today, with so much focus on personal achievement and results-based assessment, we experience a separation between prayer and work. In some settings, we focus only on work and performance and neglect to recognize the Giver, the Author, the Creator. At other times, we focus only on prayer and neglect our own responsibility to act and to allow God to answer our prayer in us and through us. At still other times, we engage in deep discussion in school board and committee meetings, doing the work that needs to be done and then, almost as an afterthought, we end with a closing prayer.

Serving the learning needs of all children should guide the agendas of all board



(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

meetings, staff meetings, administrator meetings, teacher preparation, and parent-teacher meetings. These meetings need to be surrounded with prayer. To do this work

...without prayer is ultimately to disbelieve in God and to lose the most important human values, such as faith, hope, and love. Living without prayer is the result of going to bed with all the attitudes of a modern secular society; e.g., faith in technology, hope in pragmatism, and love of human intellect. (J. Houston, p 15.)

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4-7

creates his/her own meaning; educational literature is filled with examples to help students create their own meaning. If that were the case, prayer would hardly be necessary.

However, learning is actually a process of uncovering meaning. It involves

searching for and uncovering God's "laws" for life and enjoying the freedom these bring. It involves making sense of the havoc and destructive power of sin. It involves experiencing the liberating power of redemption in Jesus Christ and being able to live daily in the restorative strength of grace in all relationships.

What do we pray?

We pray personally

as teacher, as child, as parent, as learners under Jesus' rule. We pray communally as a class, as a staff, as a home, as a board, as a committee. We pray to recognize that we are not in charge, to submit to God's rule in every aspect of our learning. We pray to give thanks for God's incredible gift of growth in knowledge and understanding as we see children, young people, colleagues, and brothers and sisters on boards and committees

grow. We give thanks for God's incomparable grace through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:15).

We pray for guidance, for understanding/insight, for strength and perseverance. We pray for wisdom, for forgiveness, for relationships, for the kind of community that Jesus makes available for us. We pray for one another, that we are strengthened in our inner being through God's Spirit, so that Jesus Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:16-17).

We pray with joy because of each other's partnership in the gospel (Phil. 1:4-5) as it comes to expression in Christian education in our work as teachers and principals, as board and committee members, as teachers and parents. We pray that our "... love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, that [we] may discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God." (Phil. 1:9-11)

As we pray, may we come "...to experience the great paradox of prayer: that as we do less, God does more. Energy increases, purpose deepens, zest spills out. Instead of being scattered and distracted, our lives become concentrated in witness and expression, real work in the real world." (Eugene Peterson, 1994.)

Praying with the early Christians

Learning is always a prayerful process. In Christian schools, prayer provides an avenue for discovering that we are totally dependent on God's creative and gracious hand. Even though we need to learn how to do things for ourselves (learning to write, read,

Why is prayer essential?

Learning isn't simply, a matter of getting knowledge of or developing skill in something by study, experience, or instruction. It isn't simply a matter of coming to know; to know how; or to acquire as a habit or attitude. Learning involves recognizing that God has created us with a longing to find meaning in the experiences of life, to see how things relate to each other and how things hang together.

Where can we find that meaning? How can we help children and young people find meaning? Our culture suggests that each person

research, teach, etc.) we are even more learning how dependent we are on the Creator and how interdependent we are with our classmates, with staff colleagues, with parents, and with our colleagues on the board and committees.

“Prayer develops us as whole people before God. To pray is to be a complete person before God, a person as God intended us to be. It is to be open, to confess, to be forgiven, cleansed, humbled, obedient, sustained, guided, strengthened, and daily renewed and inspired. Prayer radically transforms broken people into new people – people newly created by God.” (J. Houston, p. 22)

Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Psalm 5:1-3

Resources

- Sarah Arthur, 2004. ***Prayer: living in God's presence and power.*** Nashville, TN: Abingdon. (Bible study for young adults)
- Brant D. Baker, 2001. ***Teaching P.R.A.Y.E.R.: guidance for pastors and church leaders.*** Nashville, TN: Abingdon
- James Houston, 1989. ***The transforming friendship.*** Oxford, England: Lion Publishing. (1996, published as ***The transforming power of prayer: deepening your friendship with God.*** Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress).
- Eugene Peterson, 1994. ***Praying with the early Christians.*** San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Don Postema, 1997. ***Space for God.*** Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications

Short-term Programs

At this time of year, many schools are receiving inquiries from overseas and local agents regarding hosting short-term international students.

The reason for these requests is that for some countries winter break takes place in January and February; parents there would like to use this break to give their children an opportunity to experience living and studying in an English speaking environment. So how should schools respond to these requests?

Boards and administrators need to wrestle with whether or not such programs enhance or take away from the overall program of the school. Although these programs can be financially beneficial to the school, the motivation for hosting such programs should not be financial: does such a program fit the school's overall vision? A key question to ask is whether the school is willing to use this opportunity to increase awareness and appreciation, within the student/parent body, of the diversity of perspectives and cultures the Lord has created.

In order to develop a successful short-term program, schools must be developing the format and content of their own program. In other words, schools need to “own” their program. Agents will come in with many suggestions and requests for a specific format; schools that have developed policies and have a vision for what their program will look like



Marlene Bylenga
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT COORDINATOR
ieprogram@scsbc.ca

will be able to give a clear answer to agents about the services their school is able and *unable* to provide.

Several schools within the SCSBC have partnered with schools in Korea. Overseas study and experience living in a different culture are an integral part of these Korean schools' curriculums—to develop an awareness of the diversity of humankind. These partnerships have been successful because a relationship has been established between the two schools and together they have developed a common vision for their short-term program.

I encourage schools to proceed slowly and deliberately when considering short-term programs. Take the time to wrestle with the issues and prayerfully consider whether or not hosting short-term students fits the overall vision of your school.

If you need more information about short-term programs, please contact me (see email, above, or phone: 604-533-4513).

Managing Parental Conflict: *Moving from Litigation to Partnership*

Henry Contant EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR contant@twu.ca

The majority of Christian school parents are very supportive of decisions made by the school. They value and understand the special partnership they have with teachers and principal in the education of their child.

However, there are occasions when parental disagreement with school decisions moves beyond advocacy to inappropriate behavior, harassment, or even threatened/ actual litigation against teachers, principals and school board. Thankfully these incidents are rare. However, when they do occur, they consume an inordinate amount of time and cause great anxiety for school boards and staff. Perhaps because of their infrequency, principals and school boards are often ill-prepared to deal with such situations.

Any concern of any parent has the potential to escalate beyond advocacy, however the following are some of the more common 'flashpoints' as identified by R. Keel & N. Tymochenko, in their book, ***An Educator's Guide to Parental Harassment:***

1. Student Success

Parents want their children to succeed in school; teachers share this desire. Nevertheless, when a student is not quite as successful as parents may expect, this may lead to complaints that may eventually lead to harassment. Parents may have unreasonable expectations given the intellectual abilities of the student; the parent may simply object when the student doesn't get straight A's.

Many parents may believe they are simply advocating for their child's rights, not realizing they may have crossed the line.

2. Student Discipline

Most parents favour a strict school discipline policy, until it is applied to their child. Cases where students have been disciplined for bullying/violence/unacceptable behaviour may lead to harassment by the parents of the victim, and—in some rare cases—by parents of the perpetrator. The victim's parents may believe that the



principal/school board failed to address the issues that led to the incident; others may suggest that the school failed to resolve the problem, that their child continues to be victimized. Issues may also arise when parents believe their child has been wrongly targeted for discipline by the administration.

3. Special Education

Some parents become frustrated with their inability to secure what they consider to be appropriate special education programs/services. With the recent announcement by the Ministry of Education of full-funding for special needs students in independent schools, parental expectations may exceed what the school is currently providing.

4. Custody Disputes

Family law disputes may also become a 'flashpoint'. Typically one parent is granted custody (retaining educational decision-making rights) while the other is left with non-custodial access (retaining only the right to receive educational information about the child). Some non-custodial parents may become disgruntled with the amount of information being provided, his/her ability to have contact with the child while at school, or his/her restricted involvement with school activities.

5. Sports Dads (or Moms)

Some parents may question a coach's decision regarding their child, and this disagreement may lead to parental harassment. For example, the father whose son may have been suspended or cut from the team may become hostile and unreasonable towards the coach/school in his passionate attempt to seek his son's reinstatement.

Regardless of the cause, unresolved parental issues with the school will not disappear, only escalate.

Effects of Harassment

Canadian law recognizes two categories of harassment: civil and criminal. Within these categories are

five types of harassment: oral, physical, telephone, written or internet.

Many parents may believe they are simply advocating for their child's rights, not realizing they may have crossed the line. Teachers are often unprepared to handle such parental behaviours and look to the principal and board to support/protect them. Parental harassment may also have a large financial impact on schools: stress leave, early retirement, work refusal, and legal costs in the event of threatened or actual litigation against the school by disgruntled parents all impact the school's budget.

Proactive Strategies to Deal with Harassment

Parents do have a right to express concern about their children; principals must be able to discern when a parent has a legitimate complaint and when parental concern has gone too far.

1. *Board/School Protocols:* Boards should review existing policies/protocols to determine whether parental harassment is presently addressed (e.g. a parent may violate an existing school communications protocol by entering a classroom without an appointment and demanding to be heard).
2. *Professional Development:* It is absolutely necessary to instruct teachers and principals on how to deal with disruptive parents or individual harassment; this should include all staff members.
3. *Alternative Conflict Resolution:* External negotiation and mediation services may help to de-escalate a conflict. One of the advantages is that a trained mediator will allow the aggrieved parent an opportunity to 'vent', but also move the dialogue towards establishing ground rules for the ongoing relationship between school and parent.
4. *Ombudsperson:* An ombudsperson, like a third party mediator, will attempt to identify and resolve the underlying issues between the parties rather than to adjudicate and affix blame.

Principals and school boards are encouraged to establish the concept of a parental partnership early in the admissions process. A written partnership (**see sample, right**) ought to outline two things: what the school commits to the parent(s), and what the parent(s) is/are expected to commit to the school before the child is enrolled. While some forms of parental conflict are inevitable, Christian school leaders should be proactive in nurturing and strengthening partnerships with parents. Holding each other accountable in terms of action and behaviour is a positive first step towards minimizing conflict.

"ABC" CHRISTIAN SCHOOL PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS SHARED COMMITMENTS

As a school we commit to:

- *Fulfill our mission and purpose*
- *Provide a safe, nurturing environment*
- *Provide consistent communication regarding your child*
- *Provide consistent communication regarding the school*
- *Provide opportunities for involvement*
- *Provide consistency in values/discipline*
- *Offer a listening ear at any time*
- *Show respect for your child and your family*
- *Pray for and support your child and your family*
- *Use wisely the resources entrusted to the school*

As parents we commit to:

- *Support the school's mission and purpose*
- *Provide a quiet study environment at home*
- *Provide consistent communication and attend parent teacher conferences*
- *Attend pertinent school meetings and events*
- *Be appropriately involved*
- *Support the values and policies of the school*
- *Seek information and facts and not believe rumors*
- *Respect school administrators, teachers and support staff*
- *Provide prayerful support for our child and the school*
- *Honor our financial commitment in support of our child's education*

Resources

R. Keel & N. Tymochenko (2004). *An Educator's Guide to Parental Harassment*, Canada Law Book Inc. Page 14-15.

Don't Lose Them!

Mr. and Mrs. A. have been part of your school community for 20 years! Their first child began kindergarten in 1985 and their last child just graduated from grade 12 last June.

The A's have been good supporters of the school: volunteers on numerous outings and events, committee members, board members, donors to drives and special needs. So last June, did they just ride off into the sunset thankful that they don't have to pay tuition any longer? And is your school community losing a pair of dedicated, passionate lovers of Christian education who have wisdom and insights any board would love to have? Can you think of any reason why you would NOT want to keep them connected to your school? I didn't think so.

So how do you keep your 'alumni' parents connected? It starts at the graduation of their last child:

- At graduation, recognize and thank these parents for all they have done for your school. Consider giving them a gift or special recognition.
- Retain them as members of your school society. Set up a special category of membership if your bylaws limit membership to current parents only (a bad idea, but we can talk about that some other time).
- Challenge these parents to continue to support the school financially. Maybe suggest the equivalent to a month's tuition each year. Consider a special fund for their gifts along with other 'alumni' parent gifts.
- Keep them on the mailing or email list for your quarterly newsletter that goes to your broader supporting community. (You don't have one of these? We've got to have a talk.)
- Have a special section in your quarterly newsletter for the sharing of information about their lives and the lives of their children. Remember that these parents formed bonds to other parents for which there may be no vehicle for ongoing connections once their children have graduated and moved out.
- Remember to send them an annual request for updated information on their contact



information and any news about their children.

- Continue to use alumni parents as volunteers, resource persons, advisors or mentors, and committee members—especially on those committees that deal with community relations and recruitment. Retain the option of having them serve on the board since their experience and wisdom are valuable. (Of course, you wouldn't want a board dominated by parents of former students.)
- Establish a special group of founders, alumni parents and honorary members and invite them to an annual event, a luncheon perhaps, where they can see what is happening at the school. Share the possibilities of estate gifts to the school.

And while we're on the topic of retention, how do we keep our alumni connected to our school? Again, it starts as soon as they graduate, not 10 years later when they're married and looking for a school to send their children to.

- At graduation, have the alumni association president welcome the new graduates as members of the alumni association. (You don't have one of these? Let's talk.) Confirm their membership with something tangible.
- Maintain information on alumni in a database that tracks their achievements and activities both while they were

students and now that they are graduates. What clubs or activities were they involved in at school? What additional education have they taken? What recognition have they received for achievements? Who did they marry? What are the birth dates and names of their children? (In only 4 years they will be looking for a school.)

- Send alumni an annual form so they can update their information and don't be afraid to ask their parents for updated information.
- Send or email them your quarterly newsletter with an additional alumni page or send them a separate alumni newsletter. Include tidbits of information on alumni, but also feature accomplishments and appointments. And keep the vision of your school alive in their minds.
- Use your website to establish an alumni page with contact information (that you have received permission to share).
- Send notes of congratulations on special events like graduations, marriages, appointments, births of children.
- Use the expertise of alumni: coaches, tutors, role models, mentors, job-shadowing, career day presentations.
- Have an annual alumni event (alumni team versus high school team) or host class reunions.
- Ask them annually for a donation to the school. Start the year after they graduate. Set up special funds for alumni gifts which resonate with their feelings about their alma mater.

Can you think of any reason why you would NOT want to keep your 'alumni' parents connected to your school?

All of these suggestions are easy to implement and they cost very little; the returns in support for your school are tremendous.

If you would like me to meet with your community relations committee to review your options, please give me a call.

○ Our SCSBC community continues to grow! Early data collection revealed that 18 schools saw an enrollment increase; 14 schools saw a decrease. With the opening of Carver Christian High School and Mt. Cheam Christian School joining the SCSBC, our overall enrollment is up by 370 FTEs from last year, totalling approx. 9200.

○ We extend a special welcome to our newest SCSBC member: **Mt. Cheam Christian School** is a K-12 school of approx. 320 students, operating in Chilliwack for 25 years (it is a parochial school of the Reformed Congregation of North America). Mt. Cheam has been granted candidacy status as it works towards full membership. The current and founding principal of the school is Adrian Stoutjesdyk; the Vice Principal is Pons TerHaar.



○ The **Valley Christian School** Society (Abbotsford) voted unanimously to support the board's motion to sell their current campus in Matsqui Village to the Dasmesh Punjabi School (Abbotsford). Plans are for Valley Christian to re-locate to their historic roots in the city of Mission for 2006-07. Pray for the VCS community, that they will discern God's continued leading as they seek a suitable site and continue to develop their school.



○ Children who have **READY, SET, LEARN** their own books/are read to by their families get off to a flying start as learners. The Ministries of Education, Children & Family Development, and Health Services offered to co-sponsor a series of **Ready, Set, Learn** events in local schools. Schools who missed the September deadline for funding are still encouraged to offer such an event for 3 & 4 year olds. For more information:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/rsll/

RESOURCES

Curriculum

- *The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) has listed some websites of use to new teachers and administrators. These appeared in the May 2005 issue of **Educational Leadership** in an article by Rick Allen.*

Support

www.newteachers.net
www.teachersnetwork.org

Induction & Professional Development

www.newteachercenter.org
www.btsa.ca.gov

International Perspectives

www.wested.org/online_pubs/teacherinduction/#1
www.ncsl.org.uk

Getting, Keeping Good Teachers

www.rnt.org

- *Activities on the **Read/Write/Think** website can help create classroom communities. Among more than 450 peer-reviewed lesson plans, the **Read/Write/Think** website offers many lessons that can help teachers stimulate positive interaction among students. The following and others can be accessed at www.readwritethink.org:*

It's Too Loud in Here! Teamwork in the Classroom (Gr. K-2)

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=218

Building Classroom Community Through the Exploration of Acrostic Poetry (Gr. 3-5)

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=807

Exploring and Sharing Family Stories (Gr. 6-8)

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=805

The Pros and Cons of Discussion (Gr. 9-12)

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=819

- From **Reading Today**, August/September 2005

EVENTS

Coming Up

LEAD ME TO THE ROCK: CHANGING TIMES – UNCHANGING TRUTH

*6th Annual Leadership Conference for Board/Committee Members & Administrative Teams
Saturday, November 5, 2005
Langley Christian Middle/High School*

www.scsbc.ca/services/conferences/blc/blc.html

CALENDAR

November-January

November

November 4	Charitable Tax Receipting Seminar; Business Administrators Forum; Secondary Principals Meeting; SCSBC Board Meeting
November 5	“Lead Me to the Rock” - SCSBC’s 6th Annual Leadership for Christian Schools Conference
November 7	SCSBC Compensation Committee Meeting
(Fri.) November 11	Remembrance Day
November 28	International Student Coordinators Networking Meeting

December

December 16	Schools close for Christmas vacation
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January

January 3	Schools re-open
January 27-30	MissionsFest

www.scsbc.ca/calendar.html



**7600 Glover Road
Langley BC V2Y 1Y1**

Located in Fosmark Centre on the Trinity Western University campus

Telephone: 604.888.6366
Fax: 604.888.2791
Email: scsbc@twu.ca
Website: www.scsbc.ca