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Fall 2012

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On the Cover: School safety includes many factors: ensuring LGBTQ students feel included, safe bus trips to and from school, preventing cyber bullying, educating the public about speeding in school zones, and preventing violence. This issue of the MASS Journal explores all of these topics.



Professional Development and Consultation For Safe and Respectful Communities of Learners

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A Message from the President of MASS



Robert N. Chartrand
*Superintendent of Schools, South
Winnipeg School Division*

Parents, students and educators care about living and learning in a world that is safe and healthy. With all members of the school community working toward this goal, schools in Manitoba are safe and caring places to learn. Together, through this lens of strength, we find the connections, possibilities, and solutions to keep our schools safe and caring.

- *Manitoba Education*

As the President of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), I am pleased to present our Fall 2012 journal on the theme of school safety. It has often been said that students cannot learn if they do not feel safe. That is the importance of school safety.

When we think of school safety, wouldn't it be terrific if all that we were dealing with was turn-taking on the school playground or throwing snowballs? Of course, the reality is that school safety is multi-dimensional, multi-layered and, at times, quite complex. At a very basic level we know that

safe schools have clear expectations for behaviour and apply them consistently, and that all staff interact with students in positive and caring ways.

The articles in this edition of the *MASS Journal* reflect the complexity and importance of school safety. We are fortunate to have contributing authors such as Dr. Mary Hall on the impact of positive relationships, and Dr. Catherine Taylor, who provides an update on the progress and setbacks as we struggle to have LGBTQ inclusive schools. In addition, we also have contributions from school division staff. Kimberly Mackey and Louise Duncan give us insight into brain-based research and staff training in

the Prairie Rose School Division that is focused on conflict intervention and de-escalation, Linda Chernenkoff reflects on the significance of harnessing student voice in the Louis Riel School Division in advocating for human diversity, and finally, Christine Penner shares lessons learned on safety from riding 42 bus runs in the Interlake School Division.

Recently I was reminded of the work that the Search Institute has undertaken on Developmental Assets and the need for children to have a connection with caring adults and safe places to spend time. This is a reminder of who we are, and what we provide for the students in our care.

Sustainability: Educating for ACTION

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- (UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005–2014)

Welcome to our conference on Sustainability, sponsored by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents and Manitoba Education.

- The **conference**, designed for divisional teams of superintendents, trustees, principals, teachers, school business officials, and maintenance/transportation supervisors, and for staff from Manitoba Education, also warmly welcomes representatives from the universities and the many

agencies and NGOs dedicated to sustainability issues.

- A **student forum** of some 90 high school students, organized by Children and Youth Opportunities, will also be part of the divisional teams, and students will participate for much of the time in sessions designed especially for them.

Such a mix of delegates should make for wonderful networking and dialogue.

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A Message from the Minister for Manitoba Education

School safety is an important issue for everyone. Schools, families, and communities agree that all students deserve a safe learning environment, free from disrespect, physical violence, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying.

Every school division has initiatives that focus on building safer schools and I am proud to say that through the collaboration between educators and government, we have introduced legislation and launched a number of initiatives that encourage a school-wide approach to preventing, intervening in, and responding to bullying behaviours and violence. With the leadership of superintendents across our province, school divisions have met the requirements of the legislation by developing school plans, codes of conduct, crisis response plans, and reporting processes.

Working together with administrators, teachers and parents, we continue to send a strong, unified message that encourages positive behaviour and promotes safe schools. I commend members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents for your ongoing efforts to support public education and healthy communities. Thank you for helping young people meet today's challenges as they prepare to become active, responsible citizens and our leaders of tomorrow.



Nancy Allan
*Minister Manitoba Education /
ministre Éducation Manitoba*

La sécurité à l'école est une question de grande importance pour tous. Sans aucune exception, les écoles, les familles et les collectivités conviennent que tous les élèves ont droit à un milieu d'apprentissage sûr, sans manque de respect, sans violence physique ni verbale et à l'abri de toute forme d'intimidation.

Toutes les divisions scolaire ont des initiatives qui visent à rendre les écoles plus sûres et je suis fière de dire que dans le cadre de la collaboration entre les éducateurs et le gouvernement, nous avons présenté un projet de loi et lancé un bon nombre d'initiatives qui favorisent à l'échelle de l'école, la mise en place d'une stratégie pour prévenir l'intimidation et la violence et intervenir ou y faire face quand elles se produisent. Grâce au leadership des directeurs généraux à l'échelle de la province, les divisions scolaires ont satisfait aux exigences de la loi en élaborant pour les écoles des plans d'action, des codes de conduite, des plans d'intervention d'urgence et des processus de production de rapports.

En travaillant ensemble avec les administrateurs, les enseignants et les parents, nous continuons d'envoyer d'une seule voix un message fort qui favorise un comportement positif et fait la promotion d'écoles sûres. Je félicite les membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents pour les efforts constants qu'ils déploient afin d'appuyer l'éducation publique et les collectivités en santé. Je vous remercie d'aider les jeunes à relever les défis d'aujourd'hui au moment où ils se préparent à devenir des citoyens actifs et responsables et de futurs chefs de file.





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Positive Relationships:

The Foundation of Safe Schools

School safety is affected by multiple factors at the individual, peer, classroom, school, and community levels. Clearly, the complex nature of problems that threaten the safety of schools requires a multi-faceted approach to prevention. However, one common theme emerges from all approaches—the critical role of positive relationships. When schools give priority to fostering relationships built on care, respect, trust, and inclusivity at all levels, safe learning environments will be assured and all students will have the opportunity to meet their full potential. Schools throughout Manitoba are committed to this goal.

By Mary Hall

Schools, as microcosms of contemporary society, reflect an interplay of pervasive social problems. Over the last two decades, Canadians have become increasingly anxious about violence in schools. Media accounts of tragic incidents have led to heightened levels of concern. In reality, however, schools are one of the safest places for children and youth. Extreme acts of physical violence are rare. Manitoba public schools place a high priority on the promotion of safe and caring learning environments recognizing that it is paramount to the emotional, social, and academic development of their students.

This said, insidious forms of verbal abuse and social exclusion still persist, and new challenges are emerging notwithstanding the efforts of schools to discourage these and to provide positive learning and work environments for all.

Cyber-bullying is rapidly evolving as a prime concern among Canadian educators. Recent studies are also increasing awareness of the nature, scope, and consequences of complex issues such as homophobia and gender bias in schools. In their seminal work, Taylor and Peters (2011) reveal the deeply entrenched, pervasive nature of homophobia, biophobia and transphobia in Canadian schools. The findings have significant implications for policy and curriculum development, as well as teacher education and training.

Students with exceptional learning needs represent another distinct student population group particularly vulnerable to victimization (Frederickson, 2010; Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage, 2010). Racism, gender based bullying, sexual abuse, drugs, youth gangs, mental health issues, and poverty continue to be troubling matters that warrant attention and intervention in public education.

To compound the challenge, many of these problems are deeply entrenched and their origins are rooted at an early age. While they often originate in the community beyond the school walls, they can be manifested within the school hampering efforts to create caring, respectful, inclusive learning environments.

Effective, sustainable approaches to address such problems require a solid understanding of factors that contribute to them and the establishment of well informed policies, evidence-based prevention programs and interventions, and comprehensive school and division wide strategies to foster stable long-term change. Furthermore, initiatives are more likely to be effective when there is a focus on nurturing a young person's strengths and assets as opposed to deficits and risk factors. This paradigm shift is supported by the National Dialogue on Resilience in Youth (2008)

West Kildonan Collegiate students in Seven Oaks School Division participate in Period Day.



St. James-Assiniboia School Division organizes a safe schools community forum to highlight initiatives throughout the division.



The student winners and their Safe Schools Hero, all nominated for St. James-Assiniboia School Division's "Safe Schools Wall of Fame."





Above: A young participant in Evergreen School Division's Roots of Empathy program. Right: The message of respect and belonging is showcased at West Kildonan Collegiate.

and the Joint Consortium for School Health (2010).

The nurturance of authentic relationships between adults and young people needs to be at the heart of our work in schools. Every child passing through the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system should be surrounded by a circle of support that consists of adults who care, trust, respect and believes in him or her. The dedication of educators across the province reflects their contribution to making this vision a reality. The programs, policy and practices described in this article represent a mere snapshot of the wealth of initiatives currently in place in public schools throughout Manitoba.

From Vision to Reality

Proven and promising initiatives in the province are consistent with the comprehensive school health framework outlined in the report for the Joint Consortium for School Health, 2010. Increasingly, issues such as school safety are being viewed through the lens of the promotion of positive mental health outcomes for young people. The consortium's report identifies the social and physical environment, teaching and learning, partnerships and services, and healthy school policies as integral to this end. A thorough examination of all four pillars is beyond the scope of this article; however, references to select components serve to feature and provide validation for the work of public schools in Manitoba.

Pillar I: Social and Physical Environment

Physical and Emotional Safety

West Kildonan Collegiate (Grade 9 to 12) in the Seven Oaks School Division

identifies relationship building as one of its primary goals, recognizing that caring and respectful relationships are foundational to the creation of a nurturing school culture. Gerry Corr, the school's principal, believes, "The connection between relationships, communication, student attachment, engagement and learning, needs to be ever present in the minds of administration and staff."

At all levels of the school community, West Kildonan works purposely to ensure that every student feels a sense of care, respect, trust, and belonging. These core values are embedded within the very fabric of the school and reflected in initiatives such as:

- **Incoming Grade 9 Orientations:** West Kildonan counselors and Grade 10 and 11 student representatives facilitate the middle to high school transition by visiting the incoming Grade 8 students and their teachers every February. In March, students and their families are also invited to attend an Open House, registration evening, and orientation with their teacher advisor for the forthcoming year. These strategies have led to development of positive relationships and increased attachment to staff and other students early in the school year, ultimately providing a foundation that has led to a significant increase in graduation rates.
- **Teacher Advisory Groups (TAG)** are teacher led student groups that meet regularly to address students' informational and social-emotional needs. The TAG advisor, who remains with the same students from Grade 9 to 12, is encouraged to stay connected with the students and their families, as well as

acting as a source of support and guidance on a personal and academic level.

- **Period Day:** Every teacher has the opportunity to spend an entire day with one of his/her classes. It allows staff the flexibility to provide unique learning experiences, and at the same time, forge individual connections with their students.

School and Classroom Climate

"A positive climate includes norms, values, expectations and relationships that support students feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe" (Center for Social and Emotional Education, 2010). In recent years, a number of school divisions in the province—the Winnipeg School Division, Evergreen, Pembina Trails, Seven Oaks, Interlake and Prairie Rose among them—have used "Tell Them From Me," an anonymous, online, Canadian survey designed to solicit information and perceptions on student engagement, student wellness, and school climate. Carman Collegiate in the Prairie Rose School Division surveyed all three informant groups this past school year and found the data highly useful in guiding their practices and future directions. There are plans to extend it to other schools in 2012-2013.

In addition to surveys, divisions recognize the critical role of consultations with school and community groups to garner input from a broad range of stakeholders. The Prairie Rose School Division, in partnership with the Regional Health Authority, conducted a series of Round Table Community Consultations in January 2012. Participants provided feedback on a range of topics that affect the social, emotional, and academic learning environment of all students.

In the Louis Riel School Division a series of extensive in-depth focus groups with students and members of the broader community over a two year period led to the development and adoption of a policy on human sexual diversity that will likely serve as a model for other school divisions in Manitoba and beyond.

Pillar II: Teaching and Learning

Daily teacher-student interactions and shared school values are keys to enhancing learning opportunities for all children and youth. Reflecting on the importance

of honouring students with exceptional learning needs, Roberta Kula, Early Years Teacher at John de Graff School in the River East Transcona School Division, asserts, "If the ideas are not part of the core beliefs and practices of the school community and are stand alone or token in nature they will not be effective in creating real change. The valuing of people and their abilities must be an agreed upon underlying belief in the culture of the school.... Understanding and appreciating all of the contributions and abilities of all students in the classroom must be part of the everyday interactions through engagement in learning."

Student diversity takes many forms. The ever-changing cultural mosaic of Canadian society is reflected in increasingly diverse student populations in schools throughout the province and this takes many forms. The Peer Leaders Network (PLN), offered by the Canadian Centre for Diversity, contributes to the knowledge and leadership skills of students by helping them examine and address complex issues such as discrimination and prejudice based on race, cultural differences, gender identity, abilities, etc.

In the last few years, Winnipeg School Division and Louis Riel School Division piloted the PLN in some of their high schools with plans to extend it to others in the 2012-2013 school year. The program has the potential to place Manitoba students at the forefront of youth-based initiatives that promote respect for diversity and inclusion both within the public school and across the broader society as well.

Core values underscore a strength-based approach to a child's emotional, social, moral, and academic development. Through implicit and explicit interactions between adults and students, the highly acclaimed Roots of Empathy (ROE) program is nurturing these values. The St. James-Assiniboia School Division has been implementing the program in their schools for the last 10 years. Encouraged by its continued success, ROE will be implemented in 44 classrooms in all Early and Middle Years schools in 2012-2013. In the Evergreen School Division, Roots of Empathy for the Early Years classes is complemented by the HEROES program in the Middle Years. This research-based

program develops a child's sense of resiliency by building on their inner strengths and abilities to develop their full capacity as learners and as citizens.

Pillar III: Partnerships and Services

Effective approaches to address problems that jeopardize the safety of students must be proactive and coordinated and require the collaboration of all stakeholders. Schools cannot do this alone; home, school, and community partnerships are essential. Sustained family contact and communication are important steps toward achieving this objective.

In addition to proactive student-focused phone calls and emails, schools are increasingly using vehicles such as online newsletters and school websites to communicate with parents and keep them apprised of pertinent information. Student conferences and community forums are also viewed as an effective springboard for sharing, celebrating, and planning. For example, every other year, the St. James-Assiniboia School Division organizes a safe schools community forum designed to highlight the myriad of initiatives in place in schools throughout the division.

Pillar IV: Healthy School Policies

According to the JCSH (2010), healthy school policies include effective leadership, policies that promote safe and caring environments, policies for inclusion, discipline policies that restore and reconnect, policies for professional development and training, student services policies that provide timely support and shared policies that ensure system collaboration. Clearly, these policies are interconnected and highly relevant to the provision of safe schools. However, the discipline policy implemented at St. John's High School in the Winnipeg School Division warrants particular attention.

Recognizing the need to address the often difficult transition between elementary and middle school, former vice-principal Christine Penner drew from school attachment theory and restitution processes to promote positive student behaviours. As opposed to punitive approaches to discipline that often destroy relationships with students and fuel anger contributing to students' disenfranchisement, the school implemented restorative practices.

Over the course of four years, a focus on an inclusive approach and relationship building increased student-school attachment, and led to a 64 per cent reduction in student suspensions. A focus on positive approaches to student discipline has far reaching practice and policy implications.

Challenges in the area of school safety can be daunting and yet public schools across Manitoba persevere. Charged with the responsibility to ensure the safety of all students and to enable them as successful learners, educators across the province have demonstrated genuine commitment to relationship building and the understanding that the human element needs to be the foundation of all of our work. Past and present societal atrocities are a stark reminder of its importance. Ginott (1972) poignantly cautions: "Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane." ■

Dr. Mary Hall is the Director of Safe Schools Manitoba.

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A Canadian Thaw?

Signs of Progress in the Struggle for LGBTQ-Inclusive Schools

By Catherine Taylor

Until very recently, my answer to the question, “How are things going in the struggle for LGBTQ-inclusive schools?” was “Slowly. Very slowly.” The vast majority of schools, school divisions, and ministries had done little or nothing to address the exclusion and harassment of sexual and gender minority students: those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirit, or questioning their sexual or gender identity (LGBTQ). In the last year or so, however, there have been so many signs of progress in so many places throughout the school systems of Canada that it is beginning to look as though change is coming. Progressive educators seem to have decided that it is, at long last, time to act. Evidence of this development in my own research projects includes the following:

- Manitoba Teachers’ Society has partnered with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)-funded “Every Teacher Project” research team, co-signing letters to other teacher organizations across the country and providing an active advisory committee.
- Every teacher organization in English Canada has agreed to support the Every Teacher project, including the 45,000-strong Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association.

- Manitoba Association of School Superintendents has agreed to lend its support to a Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR)-funded national inventory of school-level interventions in support of LGBTQ-inclusive education. MASS support will be invaluable in encouraging their colleagues across the country to participate.

Winnipeg School Division, 1998: A Whole School Approach – Policies Without Curriculum

If a thaw is indeed underway, it has been a long time coming. For many years, Winnipeg School Division was one of only a handful of school divisions in Canada that had done more than add “sexual orientation” to its anti-harassment policies (and many have yet to do even that, provincial human rights codes notwithstanding). When Winnipeg implemented its anti-homophobia initiative in 1998, it was the first school division in the country to take a system-wide approach to shifting homophobic school culture.

Over the course of one year, all 5,000 Winnipeg One employees, from pipe fitters and bus drivers to teachers and administrators, participated in a mandatory half-day workshop in which the message was clearly communicated,

“It is the job of every single employee to address exclusion and harassment of LGBTQ students.” No exceptions were made on religious conservative grounds: human rights law and professional ethics prevailed, just as they do on other grounds of discrimination.

Winnipeg was described as “leading the way” for other divisions across the country, a few of which, such as Toronto, had started earlier and even developed curriculum resources, but left implementation up to the discretion of individual teachers and principals. In practice, this had meant that anyone with religious objections felt entitled to exempt themselves from the responsibility to act.¹

Louis Riel, Seven Oaks, and Evergreen School Divisions, 2011 – Policies With Curriculum

In the last year, several Manitoba school divisions have developed strong policies: Louis Riel, Seven Oaks, and Evergreen. Each of these policies has great merit. They state a commitment to tackling homophobic harassment, but they also go beyond reactive measures such as harassment reporting procedures to recognize the need for proactive work to make homophobic harassment less likely to occur. This can be done through student groups (Gay Straight Alliances) and awareness campaigns that include poster and assemblies. However, what

is most heartening about the policies is that they recognize the importance of curriculum and classroom discussion in this regard.

Educators have many reasons for not wanting to raise LGBTQ matters in the classroom. They think they don't know how, they think LGBTQ-education is about sexual practices, they think they have no LGBTQ students; if they are K to Grade 8 teachers they think their students are too young for sexual orientation and gender identity to be on their minds. But both sexuality and gender are very much on children's minds, and from a young age. Researchers² point out that child and youth culture is hyper-gendered and hyper-sexualized, where students are constantly under scrutiny for how well they meet conventions of masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality.

Homophobic and transphobic comments and actions provide a convenient means for students to establish their sexuality and gender credentials in this environment, and the result is a school culture where anti-LGBTQ language, insults, exclusion, rumours, and assaults are commonplace. Students are hooked on what Sarah Schulman calls the "pleasure system of homophobia"³ and need some help from educators if they are to develop the critical capacity to disengage from the hedonic rewards of mean-spirited behavior.

School Divisions Outside Manitoba

Twenty school districts in British Columbia have adopted an LGBTQ-inclusive education policy, providing for both curriculum guidelines and staff training. Like many other divisions, West Vancouver moved to develop the policy after finding that its generic approach to school safety was not working for LGBTQ students:

Even though homophobic behaviour was already banned by default under broader policies related to discrimination, it was necessary to target this particular brand of intolerance because of the especially hard reality faced by the students it affects, said Aaron White, a West Vancouver school counsellor and one of the driving forces behind the document: "The research clearly shows that,



in general, kids who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual suffer disproportionately from that kind of harassment," he said. "The effects in general are much worse on their mental health, which leads to higher rates of depression, higher rates of suicide attempts.... We have to take this kind of thing seriously."⁴

Many school division officials find that there is no public opposition to their LGBTQ-inclusive education efforts. To West Vancouver Superintendent Chris Kennedy, apprehensiveness about public reaction reflects a kind of "old-think" that does not reflect contemporary attitudes to LGBTQ people. In other BC school divisions such as Burnaby, however, there has been fierce opposition to developing LGBTQ-inclusive schools.

Alberta is routinely characterized as a right-wing culture that is uniformly hostile to any progressive politics, including the LGBTQ rights movement. If this were ever true, it is not true now. Edmonton Public School Board has implemented a thoroughgoing LGBTQ-inclusive education policy, and Calgary School Division works actively on the issue (though without the support of their School Board).

Government Action for LGBTQ-inclusive Education


Conservative Premier of Alberta Allison Redford donned a rainbow sash and marched in the Gay Pride parade in Calgary this year, telling the crowd, "Personally, it's a privilege to be able to be here to celebrate community, diversity, families, tolerance and an Alberta for 2012 where all of us feel safe, secure and confident about expressing who we are."⁵ The mayors of Calgary and Edmonton march every year. Again, the scene is

not uniformly supportive in Alberta. Bill 44 (passed into law in 2009) still allows parents to remove their children from any class involving LGBTQ topics, even though LGBTQ people are promised full equality in Canada's and Alberta's human rights laws.

Redford's public stance is all the more remarkable in light of the longstanding practice of provincial governments evading the issue in public, while providing modest financial support and staff resources in private, preferring to let school divisions lead the way (and take the political heat). However, there are signs of hope on the provincial level as well.

The Ministry of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador—working in partnership with Egale Canada, the country's leading LGBTQ-rights organization—is providing workshops for all principals, counselors, and teachers in the province. A senior Ministry official accompanied the training team, and whenever a participant questioned whether they could opt out if their school was in a religious conservative community, the official stepped in to clarify: "This is non-negotiable. It's an issue of human rights." Egale Canada's training film, *Courage in the Face of Hate*, has been mandated for inclusion the Grade 10 curriculum of every school in the province.

The one truly transformative effort on the provincial level, though, belongs to the minority Liberal government of Ontario, which developed a comprehensive diversity strategy⁶ that prominently features LGBTQ-inclusive education. Backed by the NDP, the government defended its strategy in the face of public demonstrations and religious delegations.



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The Accepting Schools Act⁷ has now been enshrined in law. The law requires all schools, including Catholic schools, to establish “Gay Straight Alliance” clubs if students want them, and it insists on freedom of expression within those clubs. (The Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association strongly supported the bill, but the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association⁸ had wanted to ban discussion of being gay, with any student mentioning it to be removed for individual instruction in Church teaching, namely that homosexuality is “intrinsically disordered” and that homosexual sex and relationships are “always evil”).

Remaining Obstacles

The single biggest roadblock to ending the exclusion of LGBTQ students from safe and respectful school efforts is conservative religious opposition, which typically involves parents’ claims that exposing their children to LGBTQ-inclusive education is a violation of their charter rights to freedom of religion. Proponents of LGBTQ-inclusiveness argue that exposure to different values is inevitable in a multicultural pluralistic school system, and that it is vital for all Canadians to learn how to peacefully and respectfully coexist with others whose values differ from our own.

This is consistent with human rights tribunal and court rulings, which have followed two key guidelines: first, that exposure to different values does not impinge on religious beliefs, and second, that freedom of religious expression is properly constrained when it impinges on other people’s rights to a safe and respectful education. In so doing, the courts are following the longstanding tradition in Canadian jurisprudence, that, “Your right to swing your fist ends at my nose.”

Several Canadian Supreme Court decisions have held that school systems are responsible for ensuring a positive school environment free from harassment for all students, and specifically for LGBTQ students. Among the most notable are *Ross v. New Brunswick School District No. 15*, [1996] 1 S.C.R. 825; *Kempling v. The British Columbia College of Teachers*, 2005 BCCA 327; and most

famously, *School District No. 44 (North Vancouver) v. Jubran*, 2005 BCCA 201. (All can be found by googling.)

“T”?

The struggle for LGBTQ-inclusive education has been impeded by the persistence of wildly inaccurate stereotypes, caricatures, and demonizations of lesbians and gay people. Parents and school officials who believed that these distortions reflected reality were horrified at the thought of the school system treating such people respectfully. The situation of transgender students is related to that of LGB students, but is not the same.

Whereas the right to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual is fully protected by the Charter of Rights and provincial human rights codes, the right to have a gender identity that does not match the “male = masculine, female = feminine” conventions of mainstream society is not. However, beginning with Northwest Territories in 2002, followed by Manitoba and then Ontario in 2012, transgender rights have been enshrined in some Human Rights Codes, and there is growing support for legislation to amend federal legislation. Transgender people (and especially transsexual people, the small minority of transgender people who feel such a strong disconnect with their birth sex that they eventually pursue sex reassignment surgery) are among the most marginalized people in our society in general, and in the hyper-gendered culture of schools in particular. Transgender children and youth endure extremely difficult circumstances at school, where they either try to pass as conventionally gendered or cope with daily insult, assault, and exclusion.

The intensity of societal insistence on observing conventional gender roles can be seen in public opposition to LGBTQ-inclusive education, which often raises the spectre of teachers confusing young children about their gender identities (even though, as is the case with sexual orientation, there is no evidence whatsoever that schools can influence a biologically male child to identify as a girl, or a biologically female child to identify as a boy). The situation of transgender students has been recognized by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, which recently published an

excellent guide for educators on *Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools*.⁹

Why all this Attention to LGBTQ?

Why should LGBTQ topics be specifically addressed, if there is no requirement for addressing other identity-based topics such as religion and ethnicity? There are a few good reasons:

1. The situation of LGBTQ students is similar in some ways to that of Indigenous students. The school system has been used to oppress both identity groups: in the case of LGBTQ students, mainly by tolerating students' homophobic behaviour and preventing teachers from practising inclusive education; in the case of Indigenous students, through explicit instruction that their culture was unworthy and punishing students who remained attached to it. The school system has a duty to work vigorously to undo some of the damage done.
2. Homophobia works by maintaining a regime of silence in schools, which gives LGBTQ and heterosexual students the message that LGBTQ people are still not fit for polite conversation, and are still not full members of the school community and the larger society. Silence in the classroom has the effect of shaming LGBTQ students and is tantamount to permission to abuse.
3. Generic approaches to anti-harassment policies and inclusive education have proven to be ineffective in protecting LGBTQ students.

Not so long ago, LGBTQ teachers were closeted or fired, and homophobic discourse about "homosexuals" preying on and recruiting children was used to prevent adults from taking action on the subject. The truth is that it is heterosexual adults who have been hurting LGBTQ children and youth by allowing homophobia to flourish unchallenged in our schools, and educators across the country are saying, "Enough. It's time to end this destructive practice." ■


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Riding the Big Yellow Bus: Lessons Learned from Bus Drivers and Students

By Christine Penner

In 2010-2011, I had the wonderful experience of riding the big yellow bus on all 42 bus routes in the Interlake School Division. This initiative was spurred by a comment made by a bus driver after a presentation on behavior management. Ken Krulicki, Transportation Supervisor in the Interlake School Division, had asked me if I would be willing to talk to bus drivers about behavior management/restitution at their professional development workshop at the beginning of the school year in September 2010.

I eagerly prepared my presentation entitled "Behavior Management on Buses" and looked forward to educating bus drivers on what I thought were some excellent strategies on managing student behavior on bus runs. I delivered my presentation enthusiastically only to see a wall of blank faces and a look of sheer boredom reflecting back at me. Bus drivers were obviously not sharing my excitement about the topic at hand.

At the end of my presentation one bus driver, with arms crossed and a glint of defiance, asked, "What do you know about driving buses and trying to manage student behavior at the same time?" Good question. I quickly responded by saying, "Actually, I know nothing about driving a school bus and trying to manage student behavior at the same time. Therefore, to increase my knowledge in this area, what I will do this year is go on a bus run with every one of you, and *your* bus run will be the first one I will go on."



That started a school year of early mornings, icy, snow covered rural roads, strobe lights acting as beacons to guide me to farms in the countryside, exhilarating conversations with bus drivers and students, and coffee or tea with bus drivers after every bus run.

I had a huge learning curve that year as bus drivers educated me on bus safety and the challenges of being a bus driver. The challenges were many, but three stand out as major areas of concern. First of all, bus drivers articulated that their biggest challenge was road conditions—icy roads, white-outs, fog, frost boils, floods. I can attest to this as on one bus run we experienced some treacherous winter conditions. Roads were icy and it was snowing heavily with close to white-out conditions. I gripped the seat in front of me anxiously looking over both shoulders to make sure we were not going to hit the ditch and watched as the bus driver calmly backed her bus into a driveway. I marveled at her courage and skill.

On another morning, it was snowing so heavily that as we were returning to the bus driver's farm we had to come to a dead stop in the middle of the highway. Once again, I was impressed with the confidence and calmness exhibited by this bus driver. Road conditions in spring were not much better. Although spring brought smiles to children's faces—likely due to the freedom of being able to jettison winter parkas, boots, mitts and scarves—it also brought roads littered with frost boils resulting in road closures and bus runs that resembled rides at the Red River Ex. By the end of the year, I clearly understood bus driver concerns regarding road conditions.

The second biggest challenge that bus drivers talked about was drive-throughs. Bus drivers explained the difficulty with identifying cars and drivers who would drive right past their red flashing lights and deployed stop signs without even slowing down. One driver said that in three years he had experienced 30 drive-throughs. I was shocked and came to fully understand their concern after I experienced one myself.

On a bright, sunny morning, the bus I was riding came to a complete stop on highway #67 with red lights flashing and the stop sign deployed. I looked out the

Driving a bus in adverse winter and spring conditions, having to constantly be aware of the potential of drive-throughs, and maintaining discipline and control of all passengers while at the same time keeping the bus on the road are not for the faint of heart.

window and saw a mother standing on the other side of the road holding the hands of two young children. Just as I saw the mother take a step forward to cross the highway, a car came flying by without a hint of slowing down. I was incensed. In my fury, I jumped up and tried to get the license plate number, colour, make and model of the car, and to identify distinguishing features of the driver. Impossible! Yet, this is what is expected of bus drivers while at the same time trying to ensure the safety of school children who are crossing roads and highways in high traffic areas. Incidents such as this have motivated Interlake School Division's Transportation Supervisor, Ken Krulicki, to lobby the government to mandate exterior cameras on all school buses. I am in total agreement.

Third on the list of challenges was dealing with student misbehaviors while operating the bus. On every bus run I asked bus drivers what they did to manage behavior which, by the end of the year, resulted in a comprehensive list of behavior management strategies. These include talking to students about bus safety and bus expectations at the beginning of every school year, having a seating plan, giving verbal warnings, moving students to the front of the bus, stopping the bus to address an issue, informing the school principal of serious infractions, doing restitution, playing music, meeting parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year, calling home about positive behaviors, building relationships and showing kindness to students.

I was especially impressed with bus driver stories about the last two strategies. Building relationships to decrease student misbehaviors is a strategy that most of the bus drivers embraced. They commented on the tremendous opportunity they had

to build strong relationships with students they've known from kindergarten to Grade 12. Many bus drivers told me about the number of weddings they get invited to after their students graduate from high school. One bus driver informed me that to every graduating student she's driven she gives a card with a \$20 dollar bill tucked inside. Another bus driver talked to me about building relationships with his middle years students by taking them to his farm to show them all his animals (with parental consent of course). Most bus drivers told me that they give students treats at Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day and Easter. I was overwhelmed by stories of kindness and generosity shown to bussed students, which helped build strong relationships.

Bus drivers weren't the only people who provided me with an education that year. Students also had some timely words of wisdom when it came to bus safety. One particular lesson I will never forget came from a kindergarten student. On an afternoon bus run I greeted all students as they got onto the bus and inquired about their day. Students were bright-eyed and eager to talk about all the fun things they were doing in school. I got caught up in conversations with students sitting all around me.

In the midst of an animated conversation with a student sitting right behind me, a cute little kindergarten girl sitting across from me called my name. I smiled at her and gave her my attention. With a wagging finger she looked me straight in the eye and emphatically stated, "Ms. Penner, you need to keep your feet out of the aisle!" The bus driver burst into laughter, as did I. When I recovered, I profusely thanked this little kindergarten girl for her lesson on bus safety and immediately tucked my feet under my seat, which is

where they stayed on all subsequent bus runs.

Furthering my education on bus safety, one bus driver took me through an entire pre-trip bus inspection. Not being particularly mechanically minded, I was totally “schooled” on the mechanical side of bus safety. I was guided through an exhausting pre-trip bus inspection checklist. I checked all the doors to make sure they opened and closed, made sure all the lights were flashing, ensured that the stop sign deployed, kicked all the tires (in high heels no less), and opened the hood

to check fluid levels, belts and a myriad of valves. I fully came to understand the importance of making sure that every part of the bus was in working order.

I then had the opportunity to drive a bus. Not on the highway of course, but within the bus transportation compound. A “bus rodeo” was scheduled on a professional development day for all bus drivers. The powers that be thought it would make for good footage to videotape me driving a bus through this obstacle course where you got points for successfully navigating your way

through. Never being one to back down from a challenge, I readily agreed to participate. Wearing my most appropriate bus driving clothes (a suit and dress shoes), I demonstrated my most excellent bus driving skills as I weaved my way around the course. I only flattened two pylons with my back tires, which lost me some points, but you have to remember that not only is it a big yellow bus, it is also a LOOOONG yellow bus. After successfully parking the bus at the end of this obstacle course, I marveled at the skill level that is required to drive a bus. It’s not easy maneuvering a bus in tight situations. When all was said and done, I ended up with a pretty good score and the bus drivers got a kick out of watching the video, which only helped to further forge my relationships with them.

I have gained a tremendous amount of respect for bus drivers. Bus drivers play a very important role in our educational system. Delivering students to school safely and bringing them back home safely is a huge responsibility. Driving a bus in adverse winter and spring conditions, having to constantly be aware of the potential of drive-throughs, and maintaining discipline and control of all passengers while at the same time keeping the bus on the road are not for the faint of heart.

A year later, with my new bus knowledge, I had the distinct privilege of delivering another presentation to bus drivers. This time my topic was entitled, “Bus Runs: Lessons Learned from Bus Drivers and Students.” Once again, I enthusiastically delivered my presentation, but this time there was a light in their eyes and laughter rippled across the room. Many relationships and friendships had been developed. My bus runs and bus experiences have provided me with a wealth of information and knowledge regarding bus safety and behavior management on buses. In the end, it was I who got educated. So, if you ever find yourself riding the big yellow bus, for goodness sake, please keep your feet out of the aisles! ■

Christine Penner is Assistant Superintendent – Interlake School Division.



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Overall speeds decreased slightly during the times when children were arriving for school and departing for the day. However, a significant percentage of drivers still exceeded the posted 50 km/h speed limit.



School Zone Safety: The Collaborative Pilot Project

By Adam Cheadle, B. Ed.

In September 2011, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and Manitoba Public Insurance launched a one-year pilot project to improve school zone safety. The initiative, which was designed to educate Manitobans about road safety and risky driving behaviours, was the first collaborative partnership between the two organizations.

The pilot project focused on high traffic volumes and driving speeds in school zones—two factors that were considered serious risks to the well-being of students, staff and volunteers. According to Manitoba Public Insurance, nearly 30 per cent of pedestrians struck by vehicles in 2010 were age five to 19.

Setting the Stage

The pilot project began with an examination of best practices in school zone safety by Manitoba Public Insurance and a school risk assessment conducted by principals in various divisions to determine which schools should be the highest priorities. As a result, 12 schools were selected: six in Winnipeg and one each in Gimli, Niverville, Portage la Prairie, Morden, Neepawa, and Boissevain.

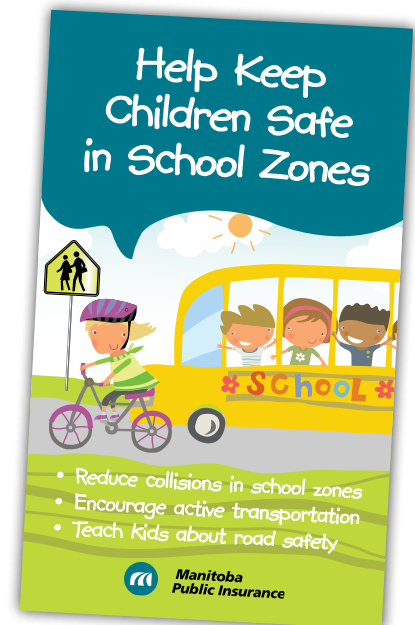
Pilot Program Activities

The cooperative activities between MASS and Manitoba Public Insurance were intended to address speed and traffic volume concerns in school zones and included: production of a new brochure; student surveys; use of a radar recording

device and speed reader boards; and advertising.

School zone safety brochure: MASS and school administrators observed that the practice of dropping off and picking up children creates significant road safety issues, consistent with findings in other jurisdictions (Green Communities Canada, 2010). In consultation with MASS, Manitoba Public Insurance produced a school zone safety brochure (shown to the right) for distribution to parents who regularly drive their children to and from school. Five thousand brochures were distributed to participating schools and electronic copies of the brochure were posted on school websites and on the Manitoba Public Insurance website (www.mpi.mb.ca/english/brochures/brochures.html).

Hands-up student surveys: Hands-up surveys were identified as a simple yet effective way to measure the number and percentage of students who are not driven to school versus those who are. In order to assess changes in behavior once pilot project activities concluded in 2012, schools completed hands-up surveys in their classrooms at the outset of the initiative. This exercise will be repeated in September/October of 2012 for comparison to the previous year. Schools can then use the results to identify areas where further improvement may be possible and gauge the success of the school zone safety project and individual school initiatives in encouraging active transportation alternatives (Green Communities Canada, 2011).



JAMAR radar recorders: To obtain accurate estimates of the average driving speeds and traffic volume in selected pilot project school zones, Manitoba Public Insurance worked with the RCMP to set up JAMAR Radar recorders. These devices provided schools with extremely valuable information on local traffic patterns. This data could be used by school administrators when:

- Discussing traffic situations around the school with local authorities; and
- Planning future school zone safety initiatives.

School Zone SpeedWatch Program: This program's speed reader boards were made available to the pilot project schools from September to November 2011. The electronic display boards were set up near schools and monitored by school staff,

volunteers, and students. The goal of SpeedWatch is to:

- Alert drivers to the speed at which they are traveling in school zones compared to the posted speed limit;
- Prompt speeding drivers to slow down when they encounter SpeedWatch displays and volunteers.

Advertising and articles: In September 2011, Manitoba Public Insurance placed advertising and news articles about school zone safety in a variety of print and electronic media. Among these were: Driving Tips ad in *Winnipeg Free Press*; *Manitoba Driver* articles distributed to all print media in Manitoba; a SpeedWatch promotion in Manitoba School Boards Association newsletter; *60 Second Driver* segments on CTV Winnipeg; and radio public service announcements.

Key themes of these items were speeding and traffic volumes in school zones, the dangers of passing school buses, and cycling safety.

Outcomes and Observations

Hands-up survey data: Data collected from the first round of classroom hands-up surveys was diverse and informative. Superintendents were surprised at the number of children being driven to school and how few were walking to school. Generally, the results indicated:

- Significant rates of private car trips (parents taking children to and from schools) in both urban and rural schools;
- Higher rates of school bus use associated with rural schools; and
- Higher rates of walking associated with many urban schools.
- Some stated factors that influenced the choice of travel to and from school were:

- School location (i.e. near roadways with higher speed limits and higher traffic volume);
- Existing pedestrian infrastructure (i.e. sidewalks, walkways connecting streets, and decreasing walking distance);
- Cultural make-up of the school population; and
- Socio-economic factors of the school population.

These factors were often unique to individual schools and contribute to the variations witnessed in the survey data. Also, input from each school showed that even in the same location staff and parents had different perspectives on the problem. This data did, however, allow for identification of opportunities for schools to influence a shift from parents driving children to alternative travel modes such as carpooling, cycling, and walking all or part of the way to school. These changes have the ability to significantly decrease the traffic around the schools resulting in decreased risk to youth cycling or walking to school.

The charts shown in Figure 1 illustrate the rural and urban averages for modes of transportation used by students at the 12 schools involved in the pilot. The graphs clearly show a significant percentage of students are driven to school in private vehicles.

JAMAR radar recorders: Overall speeds decreased slightly during the times when children were arriving for school and departing for the day. However, a significant percentage of drivers still exceeded the posted 50 km/h speed limit. At Niverville Elementary School, for example, JAMAR data revealed that 35 per cent of drivers exceeded the speed limit from 8 to 9 a.m. and 3 to 4 p.m. when school children were most likely to be present, and 42 per cent did so between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. At Fort la Reine School in Portage la Prairie,

23 per cent of drivers exceeded the speed limit during times when school children were most likely to be present.

Figure 2 is a graph of the speed data collected for Niverville Elementary. There were similarities in the data collected among all 12 schools.

School zone speedwatch data: The School Zone SpeedWatch Program data showed that even with the visible presence of a speed reader board and volunteers, a noticeable number of vehicles still travelled above the posted speed limit. However, the volunteers monitoring the speed reader boards did notice a significant reduction in speeding and aggressive driving behaviours when the reader board was present. Many of the participating schools hoped to host SpeedWatch again in the fall of 2012.

Lessons Learned

The inaugural partnership between MASS and Manitoba Public Insurance proved to be very fruitful and yielded many lessons from an operational perspective and different perspectives on school zone safety.

- 1) **Walking or cycling:** Many children are being driven to school rather than walking or cycling. These children are missing out on the benefits of exercise as they travel to and from school. There is opportunity for individual schools to develop programs to promote walking or cycling with the added benefit of decreasing the traffic congestion in school zones and potential risk associated with that. School Travel Planning is one way to encourage active transportation and provide parents with some confidence that their children will be safe going to school on their own.
- 2) **Each school is different:** Differences among the schools in location,

Figure 1.

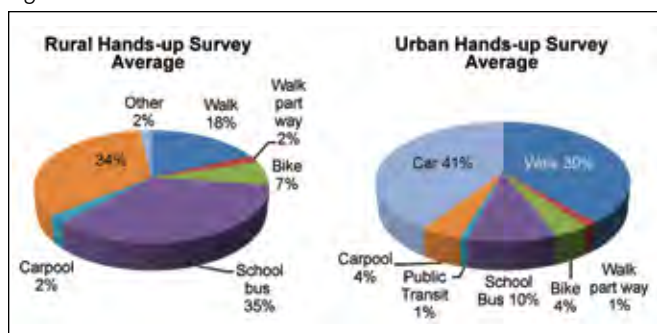
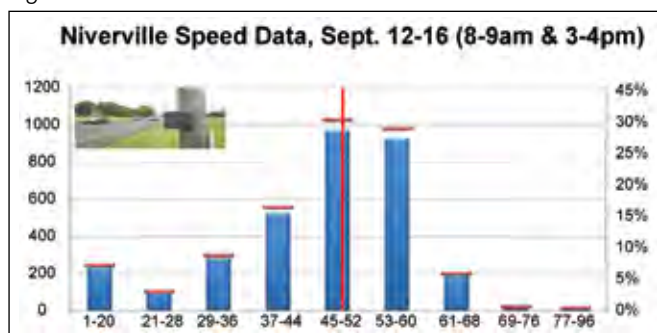


Figure 2.



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demographics, and perspective meant that each had unique ideas about the best way to tackle their road safety challenges. It was also evident that schools do not exist in isolation from the community in which they are located, meaning school zone safety solutions often hinge on the bigger picture with location, demographics, culture, and socio-economic conditions all influencing what may work in any one school.

- 3) **Multi-pronged partnerships pave the way:** Because some safety solutions proposed for certain schools were beyond the scope of Manitoba Public Insurance's education and road safety awareness mandate, a need for multi-pronged partnerships was identified. One such partnership is with the Green Action Centre and their promotion of School Travel Planning.
- 4) **Every school needs a champion:** The presence of a champion within the school is essential for new and innovate programming opportunities to gain traction. This is consistent with observations from other countries where similar initiatives have been launched (Green Communities Canada, 2010). In their *Review of International School Travel Planning Best Practices*, Green Communities Canada states: *All the plans in the world won't work unless a real, dynamic leader in each of the schools opens it all up.*

To learn more, contact the MPI Road Safety department at (204) 985-8737. ■

Adam Cheadle is a business analyst with Manitoba Public Insurance Road Safety department. He holds a Bachelor of Education from the University of Manitoba and has 12 years of experience in the educational field.

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A Mission and Vision Honours the Diverse Human Journey:

Policy Development to Support Sexual and Gender Identity

The conviction of our School Board and our Superintendent of Schools to “become the change we want to see” by advocating clearly and uncompromisingly for the integral aspect of human sexual identity propelled policy development, professional learning, and a communications plan that invited our community’s soul-searching conversation and harnessed the “student voice.”

By Linda Chernenkoff

Nearly three decades have passed since educators began serious consideration of how to implement human sexuality curricula in our classrooms—and why we needed to embrace that controversial mandate. Although pragmatic goals of reducing teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases impelled Family Life Education (FLE) in the late 1970s (and were frequently cited to respond to the scrutiny of concerned communities), two main premises grounded FLE curriculum in the 1980s and effectively negated our reliance on statistical “scare tactics”:

- If young people’s decisions were grounded in self-awareness, respect for others, communication skills, and accurate information, they would defer sexual activity, or, at least, employ contraception.
- “Family-focused” lessons would assist young people to realize that parenthood was a serious responsibility and best deferred until they were involved in committed relationships.

The curriculum’s emphasis on relationships had unintended results. Exploring human dynamics invited questions by young people searching for their personal truths in a society that had no public vocabulary for those truths, and

that feared the potential impact of open discourse about alternative sexual and gender identity. The “nature-nurture” debate was alive and well.

Further, the emergence of HIV simultaneously invited our consideration of the wide spectrum of human sexual expression and stigmatized it: erroneously associated with sexual identity rather than sexual behaviour, this global health crisis appeared to vindicate factions that portrayed sexual identity as a moral issue. The dissonance effectively muted the “student voice” as the adult debate raged. Curricular tensions derailed a larger dialogue about our core purpose. Indeed, the curricular hegemony that defined schooling in the 1990s focused on “outcomes,” and education for social justice was not explicitly on our radar.

As the 21st century unfolds, we are finally “getting it right” in a critical professional discourse because we now understand our broader mandate—supporting all people to define their personal identity is integral to social justice and sustainable development. We are succeeding because principled school boards, supported by



educational leaders, increasingly consider three questions:

1. What are the key aims and purposes of education?
2. What ethical principles and ideals must support those aims and purposes?
3. What is the appropriate distinction between “private” opinion and “public” responsibility?

As the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) marks our tenth anniversary, these and other questions have exhilarated our first decade. We also celebrate a singular policy achievement as a visible realization of our Vision and Mission. With a historical preface offered, our critical path to advocate respect for Human Sexual Diversity provides a “case study” in “student voice.” With acknowledgement to Thomas Sergiovanni, whose



The Human Rights Code of Manitoba recognizes the individual worth and dignity of every member of the human family, and this principle underlies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and other solemn undertakings, international and domestic, that Canadians honour.

The Code prohibits discrimination on the basis of a number of characteristics, such as ancestry, nationality, ethnic background, sex, sexual orientation, and others. It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of membership in other groups, such as persons with disadvantaged social condition or persons who are transgendered.

emphasis on “the right thing” consistently grounds our Superintendent of Schools & CEO’s commitment to “the right way,” our path also centres on “the right reason.”

The Right Thing

In the years preceding the work of our School Board and our Superintendent of Schools & CEO to develop our policy on Human Sexual Diversity, several factors validated its importance:

- The demographic of families parented by same-sex couples validated our goal to provide the “safe, inviting and inclusive environments” at the heart of our Vision and Mission.
- LRSD teachers expressed increasing concern about children and young people who did not fit conventional “male” and “female” roles and thus experienced social isolation.
- Articulate community members, well-versed in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, questioned public schools using any facilities and services whose policies prohibited access by same-sex couples (and implicitly, their children).
- The *First National Climate Survey on Homophobia* (2010), following comprehensive research led by Dr. Catherine Taylor, PhD, noted that nearly 60 per cent of self-declared heterosexual students reported being upset by homophobic comments about peers.
- A professional learning event sponsored by our Student Services nurtured a collective “epiphany” about a misunderstood dimension of sexual diversity—gender identity.

While no single factor decisively incited

action, our School Board embraced the “teachable moment.” Arising from our Superintendent’s belief that we must identify the scope and nature of a challenge to develop its solution, his critical first step was convening a focus group of 24 teacher colleagues from high school, elementary, divisional, French Immersion and English programs between January and June 2010. They reviewed information about human sexual diversity, and offered three primary recommendations:

- Policy must articulate principles of organizational behaviour, and honour legislative contexts.
- Our learning community must engage in authentic processes to prevent sole dependence on policy to define “the right thing.”
- We must treat sexual and gender diversity as a human right to unique personal identity.

The focus group concluded with elements to shape our action plan:

- Prioritize long-term commitment to students who need to define their sexual or gender identities.
- Consider five constituent needs for information: students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the greater community.
- Appreciation for human diversity must guide school and divisional planning processes, and support core Board Priorities: Climate & Culture, Student Learning and Professional Practice.
- School and divisional Student Services Teams are critical supports.
- Consultation (an annual LRSD “tradition”) is essential to activate the “student voice.”
- Establish a divisional process to identify appropriate instructional resources.
- Develop a professional learning plan for all LRSD employees to understand human sexual diversity and support students, with appropriate consideration for roles and responsibilities.

The Right Way

Credible research about human sexual development validates sexual and gender diversity as a human right. Recent statements by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) offer

essential foundations to challenge unhelpful—if not unethical—premises that our gender identity and sexual orientation are “choices,” rather than immutable and integral aspects of our personalities.

In February 2007, an APA task force dispelled the myth that ethical “therapeutic” responses exist for sexual orientation or gender identity. Based on scientific facts, the task force essentially concluded that a “multi-culturally competent and affirmative approach” acknowledged many factors as key to healthy, diverse, and unique human personalities: age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.

Similarly, two statements from the CPA support both our focus group recommendation and the spirit of an important facet of our *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*:

Gender Identity in Adolescents and Adults (October 2010)

The Canadian Psychological Association affirms that all adolescent and adult persons have the right to define their own gender identity regardless of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role. Moreover, all adolescent and adult persons have the right to free expression of their self-defined gender identity.

The Canadian Psychological Association opposes stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination on the basis of chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role, or on the basis of a self-defined gender identity or the expression thereof in exercising all basic human rights.

These and other sources informed our Division’s initial draft policy on sexual diversity, with first reading in January 2011, and including three key elements:

1. The Policy Statement

- Public education is guided by foundational values of equity and respect.
- Fulfilling our Vision and Mission depends on safe learning environments.
- “Sexual orientation and gender identity form significant and integral aspects of the unique development and personality of every child and young person.”
- Everyone has the right to work and learn in accepting environments.

- We are responsible to respect the laws of our province and nation.

2. Guidelines: “what follows from our beliefs about human sexual diversity?”

- LRSD actively promotes respect in schools, other learning environments and workplaces.
- All LRSD staff are responsible to promote respect for others’ rights to personal identity, and to address disrespectful behaviour.
- All LRSD students are responsible to respect others’ rights to their identity and to refrain from disrespectful behaviour.

3. Procedures: “what we do to support our beliefs”

- We use appropriate resources, curricula, and policies supports, to respond to student needs.
- We provide professional learning for staff teams.
- We communicate to help our divisional community understand.

The policy language also respects brain-based learning. Supported by consultation with Egale Canada, foregoing current acronyms for sexual diversity (including, but not limited to “LGBTQ”) lends durability to the policy document. Of further importance, our school board and superintendent believed that our policy’s defining positive actions—rather than discouraging negative behaviour—would convey the best message. They focused on “freedom of self” rather than “freedom from violence.”

Questions and suggestions from parent and student focus groups, respectively convened in November 2011 by our school board and our superintendent, only strengthened the policy development process. One prevalent question from parents echoed staff teams’ review of the policy: “Why focus on one aspect of human diversity?” The only possible—and necessary—response cites empirical data: it is one aspect of human identity for which negative judgements remain “valid” in segments of our society. Grades 9 to 12 students in our superintendent’s focus group resoundingly supported this response and the policy—even as they asked valuable “What if?” questions to test it!

Further, “FAQs” derive explicitly from middle and senior years students’ beliefs

about what peers need and want to know about human sexual diversity. Teacher teams have collaborated to ensure that the publications honour student feedback, engage all students in climate building discussions, and promote literacy for “value added.” Through scrupulous assessment processes, teams of teacher-librarians have identified resources that respect family diversity, cultural and faith-based sensibilities, and the attributes of good literature.

Our school board’s adoption of our policy *Standards of Employee Conduct* (June 2012) also advances our global commitment to social justice by reaffirming the ethical, legal, and societal contexts that define the public education mandate. However, the pillar on which our success also rests is the capacity, integrity and exemplary investments of all our division’s employee groups. Therefore, an annual professional learning model that began in September 2011 with the *Crisis and Trauma Resource Centre’s* invaluable expertise—and included the entire LRSD staff in discussions that continue to resonate—will sustain key understandings:

- Distinctions between and impact of sexual orientation and gender diversity on the human personality.
- The rationale and principles that support our policy.
- The skills to respond effectively and ethically to student needs.

For The Right Reason

Referencing legislation in our policy celebrates our national stance on this fundamental issue of social justice. Some constituents may view “It’s the law of the land” as a fallback excuse, but when the safety of children and young people is at stake, we do whatever is necessary to honour the ethic of caring that Nel Noddings believes must ground our work on their behalf.

We remember both the relationship and the distinctions between sexual orientation and gender identity—various researchers confirm the harm in assuming causal relationships between the two dimensions (Heffernan, University of Oregon; Moore, University of British Columbia). Narrow views of “male” and “female” engender labels; students that are not part of a minority (gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning,

transgender, or transsexual) may lack empathy for those who are.

Further research suggests that non-minority students may also experience bullying, based on assumptions about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Consequently, a tempting argument for policy on human sexual diversity promotes the “pragmatic” benefits for all students, and effectively answers parental questions—what parents don’t want their children safe from ridicule based on stereotyping? However, while “the greatest good for the greatest number” can support seamless policy implementation, focusing on “the right reason” accrues enduring progress.

“Perception is reality.” So we will develop bias-free and gender-neutral forms that acknowledge diverse family compositions and student needs; facilities accommodations will respect human dignity and diversity; and all LRSD high schools support student alliances. We will also enhance our diversity initiative in the context of our Division’s Social Emotional Learning Framework (SELF), to ensure that no student is defined solely by sexual orientation or gender identity. The thousands of children and young people that form our key constituency are literary (and literate), musical, artistic, mechanically inclined, technically adept, sports-oriented, socially committed, compassionate, culturally diverse and multi-faithful.

In closing, we note that the current report of the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) confirms that over 80 per cent of a recent sample of Canadian parents supports the nation’s classrooms addressing sexual orientation and gender diversity. Considering this finding and their age range begs a new question: Do these parents, who were students during our first foray into “risk” curricular waters, now affirm the power of their voices to advocate for all children? ■

Linda Chernenkoff is an Assistant Superintendent in Louis Riel School Division.

A complete list of references for this article is available at www.mass.mb.ca



Increasing School Safety in Prairie Rose School Division

If the adults in the school are enthusiastic, positive, and emotionally healthy, and have a unified focus on doing what is in the best interests of students, then the school climate will be a healthy and positive environment. This environment in itself will help create a prevention-oriented atmosphere and will help prevent problems before they start.

– Casella

By Louise Duncan & Kimberly Mackey

Several years ago, staff at Prairie Rose School Division increasingly requested support in dealing with difficult behaviours in the classroom, particularly concerned about escalations that could impact student safety. Prairie Rose School Division (PRSD) follows *The Safe Schools Charter for Manitoba* to:

...ensure that each pupil enrolled in a school within the jurisdiction of the school board is provided with a safe and caring school environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours (The Safe Schools Charter, 2004, clause 41(1) (b)).

Initially, this need was addressed through keynote speakers and divisional professional development in large-conference settings. We evolved in our approach to giving staff support through the provision of direct training in small-groups. Staff reflections indicate that this small group professional development has resulted in utilizing practical classroom strategies and improved staff collaboration.

New teachers and clinicians receive Dealing with Behaviour training,

which we developed, while Working Effectively with Violent and Aggressive States (WEVAS) is integral to our divisional plan to promote student safety. WEVAS is implemented division-wide for all staff and for our local Child Care providers, with “refresher” workshops provided for those previously trained.

Staff report such layered training has resulted in a common language, increased safety of both students and staff, and increased time on task within their classrooms.

Training to Increase Student Safety and Time on Task

In order to provide a background understanding of what drives behaviour, training begins with theory about the basic needs of our students. Drawing on the work of Martin Brokenleg and the Circle of Courage, we explore concepts of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity.

Theory is quickly followed with the practical skills necessary to deal effectively and positively with student behaviour. We weave opportunities for staff participation through sharing personal experiences and challenging situations. We have found such dialogue to be encouraging to all staff as we face

similar behavioural challenges that can seem daunting. The outcome of this workshop is to instil the appropriate teacher responses that will decrease the time spent dealing with student conflict and instead foster learning environments that increase time on task:

One of the most important skills youth workers can acquire is to avoid being lured into counter-aggression with difficult youngsters.... Typically the adult is lured into responding in kind, thereby fulfilling the child's negative prophecy about adults" (Brendtro et al, 1990).

Maintaining a calm, effective approach during a student's escalation builds the trusting relationship between staff and student, a commodity that can be traded upon in future episodes to halt the cycle of escalation. In the classroom, the student begins to understand that this person WILL help, will remain in control of this situation, and will find an amicable resolution to get back on task.

How does this keep students safe? Everyone learns the same strategies, including our students. School staff can back one another up in a difficult situation: we remove observers to a safe space, we give the child an opportunity to de-escalate, and/or we assist the adult in charge to stay in a competent state. Our students know the language as well, and will remind us when we've slipped up!

Recently a student who has run through the cycle of rage many times said to us, "They (school staff) didn't give me enough time! I'm supposed to have time to calm down! I needed more time and then I would have been fine! Don't you know this by now?" Indeed,

we frequently feel the pressure to have situations 'fixed' before the bell goes. When staff members have completed training together, they are better able to let go of that pressure, knowing that their administrators will support the time they give to de-escalation. Time and again, our educational assistants and new teachers report gratitude for the "permission" to take a few minutes to de-escalate a conflict, secure in the knowledge that this preserves the rest of the class time for learning.

Layered Training

PRSD incorporates The Rage Cycle model identified by Brenda Smith Myles and Jack Southwick in *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns*. Providing a practical model of how we ALL experience frustration and escalation, this model directs our interventions as we assist a child through a natural process of frustration and rage. The cycle typically runs through three stages: the rumbling stage, the rage stage, and the recovery stage.

All presented theory is supported through videos, audio clips, and scenarios that exemplify the research. In this way, participants' brains can use multiple modalities to incorporate new information into everyday practice. "Working from instinct" typically means that our brain has not incorporated a different plan other than an emotional reaction. The goal is to retrain our brains so that we no longer react in a fight or flight manner, but rather we respond to our students' needs positively and with intention.

As adults, we must understand the conflict cycle in order to keep ourselves in a rational state during an episode of

escalation. By offering "real life" scenarios that our participants problem-solve together, staff members readily identify the moments they've "gone off track" and can work through the situation in a supported group setting. Having the collaboration of peers, and hearing the feedback from other colleagues, has an immediate impact on practical learning and solutions to draw from in the future.

Further to the Dealing with Behaviour workshop, PRSD has opted to offer two-day WEVAS training as created by Dr. Neil Butchard and Bob Spencier. The WEVAS model expands upon the cycle by identifying our states as anxious, agitated, aggressive and assaultive. In all of our training, we emphasize the concept of *calibration*:

The ability to recognize a student's characteristic physiology and behaviour patterns when s/he is in a "competent state" is called calibration. We calibrate students so we can know when they are in an anxious state. We also calibrate students so we can know whether our interventions are helpful.... Effective teachers calibrate students all the time. It becomes an "early warning system" that helps us to intervene effectively before the behaviour becomes a crisis" (Butchard & Spencier).

This idea of calibration is an important one that we revisit in several ways throughout these training sessions. Essentially, we are asking staff to realise that it is their competency and control that will effectively guide students to a calm, competent state ready for learning.

Preserve the Relationship

Layering our training provides information from a number of sources



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and resources: Dr. Martin Brokenleg, Educator Corwin Kronenberg, Educator Richard Lavoie, WEVAS training, and Kevin Cameron, among others, all combine to teach us to maintain our own limits as adults while preserving the relationship needed with our students:

The most potent behavioural influence that an adult can have in the life of a child comes when an attachment has been formed.... Too often behavioural crises elicit adult responses that widen the relationship gulf; however, when

the adult manages these crises with sensitivity, the relationship bonds will become more secure (Brendtro).

We experience this time and again in reality; tough students will respond positively for those of us who have connected with them. We can ask more of them, we can push them further, and we can hold our expectations higher:

If the adults in the school are enthusiastic, positive, and emotionally healthy, and have a unified focus on doing what is in the best interests of students, then the school climate will be

a healthy and positive environment. This environment in itself will help create a prevention-oriented atmosphere and will help prevent problems before they start (Casella).

We learn to diffuse disruptive behaviour from a relational perspective rather than from a punishment perspective. We seek resolution to problems without placing blame, strive toward children owning their behavioural choices and developing “fix up” strategies together.

Controlling Our Own State Leads to Safety

In teaching that we do not control anyone’s behaviour but our own, we are not recommending that staff members “give in” to student demands. Instead we maintain our power by staying in a rational “thinking brain” state of mind. Rather than exacerbating a conflict by entering into a power struggle with a student, our philosophy is to respond with the road map that leads students into a state where they are competent to learn again. The entire goal of educational behaviour support is to increase the time that effective education can take place. Brenda Smith Myles identifies what we all know from experience—that when a child is in the rage cycle, “she cannot learn new skills” (Smith Myles, 2005).

In a recent discussion with a teacher, she described witnessing a frazzled parent dealing with a child in a local grocery store. During the conversation, the teacher innocently commented that “kids learn to match state with state” and as a result of the parent’s impatience, the child’s behavior began to escalate. This situation escalated into a predictable cycle of negativity. However, the benefit for us was that the teacher had internalized the teachings in our model, and was applying them effortlessly across experiences. That simple concept “kids match state with state” can guide so many of our interactions with students!

Common Language = Common Culture of Student Safety

As a divisional team, we must ensure that we provide curricular outcome-based activities and projects that are interesting and meaningful to our students. Further staff development is provided in areas



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including active teaching and learning methods such as cooperative learning, problem-solving approaches, and experience-based projects. "When students succeed at work in school and feel a sense of competence and autonomy, they are more likely to feel valued and cared about as persons" (Lickona, 2007). Such a relationship-focused shift in teaching practice will naturally enter into shifting practices pertaining to discipline.

Problem behaviours tend to escalate when students are without the skills necessary to behave in desirable ways. Skills such as academic competence, anger management, conflict resolution and social problem solving are important for effective participation in their academic environment. We are encouraged, through feedback from our workshops, that teachers are more prone to ask, "What do my students need to know and be able to do to behave appropriately?" rather than, "Why did my students misbehave?" And students learn to ask, "What do I need to do to calm down and fix this?" rather than "What kind of trouble am I in?"

As we race around trying to meet deadlines we need to learn to stop and listen. Of particular importance is to listen to the voices of those who have harmed and those who have been harmed. Calibrating the student to our state of calm competence de-escalates conflict and keeps everyone safe. The key to PRSD training is to clearly identify what the adult needs to do during student conflict situations.

Our workshops emphasize the behaviour we, as adults, can control: our own. We ensure our "state" is one of competence and we remain in "thinking brain" so we don't cycle into the conflict with our student. Effective interventions are taught and rehearsed throughout trainings. Adults have an opportunity to practice these skills in safe partnerships, receive feedback about their responses, and can return to their classrooms the next day with practical experience. ■

Louise Duncan is Resource Teacher and Vice Principal of Carman Elementary School, and Kimberly Mackey is a Social Worker in Prairie Rose School Division.

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Self/Peer Exploitation and Cyber Bullying: Intervention and Prevention Strategies for a Serious Social Challenge

By Noni Classen and Signy Arnason

Technology plays a central role in our day to day lives. For adolescents, electronic communication is seamlessly weaved into their relationship building and by and large affords them incredible opportunity. At the same time, we need to be aware of situations that have serious negative consequences for youth. Over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the number of reported cases of young people involved in *self/peer exploitation*. This type of exploitation, coined in the media as “sexting,” is generally defined as youth creating, sending or sharing sexual images and/or videos with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices. Self/peer exploitation usually involves exchanging images/videos through cell phone messaging, messaging apps (on iPhones, Blackberries, Androids), social networking sites, etc.

This issue is a serious social challenge impacting families, peer relationships, communities, and, inevitably, school environments. As the problem often arises from a breakdown in school-peer relationships, regardless of whether the incident occurred inside or out of school, educators have a vital role to play. Youth now transport the Internet on tiny devices that are tied to them every second of the day; along with that come any issues that have ensued while using that device. As an institution of learning, schools have a unique opportunity to build awareness, influence beliefs, and shape values concerning the use of social media.

So, where does one begin? How schools respond to cases of self/peer exploitation is influenced by several factors. It is imperative that the principal or his/her designate gather as much information as necessary to understand why it occurred, the nature of the content created, the circumstances around the content being created, and extent of the distribution.

Probably the most common reason youth end up involved in a self/peer exploitation incident is as a result of a romantic relationship or sexual experimentation. In these instances, images may be produced and shared voluntarily or may end up circulating to others with or without the knowledge of the youth in the images. There are countless stories of ex-partners looking to embarrass or hurt youth following a break-up, and doing so by sharing sexual images that were created while together.

Producing and sharing sexual images can also result from youth seeking attention. Adolescents may engage in this activity as a result of a joke, a dare or a challenge.

Images may also be posted publicly (e.g. Facebook®, YouTube®) in an attempt to gain acceptance or popularity. The circulation of these images may be with or without the knowledge of the youth in the images.

While trying to establish why the incident occurred, be mindful that coercive

circumstances carry the most serious consequences. These cases involve malicious intent and may be motivated sexually and/or for controlling purposes. In these situations, a peer, romantic partner or online acquaintance often threaten the youth to comply with certain demands. Keep in mind that it is not uncommon for an adolescent to acquiesce, particularly if their peer has other sexual images or chatlogs that, if released publicly, may be embarrassing. Images may also be obtained during circumstances where the adolescent is unaware, unwilling or in a compromised position (e.g. images taken at a party and posted on a social networking site).

Once you have an idea as to the “why,” the next step is to collect information about the nature of the content (degree of sexual explicitness); the intent around the creation (impulsive versus malicious); and the extent of the distribution (range of where the content has been sent). Each situation may vary significantly and present its own unique challenges and solutions. Each of these dimensions can influence the impact on the youth involved, the intervention(s) by the school, and whether police involvement is required.

While gathering information, assess how an incident is likely to affect the child based on the protective and risk factors surrounding the child’s life. Consider the child’s inherent resilience, family dynamics, peer influences, and school connectivity. To gain better insight about the child’s perceptions, inquire about their biggest fears about the situation, such as what they’re most worried about happening, and how they would like to see things resolved. Answers to these questions may inform the direction the school takes to address the situation.

In the course of following-up on situations of self/peer exploitation, school personnel are cautioned not to actively seek out viewing the questionable images/videos. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, parents/guardians should also be discouraged from doing so. Limiting the number of individuals who see the content is in the best interest of the child, regardless of how the youth presents.

Some beneficial ways to help support the affected youth include:

- Being optimistic and reinforcing that s/he will persevere;

- Shaping positive self-talk and helping to reframe how s/he view the incident;
- Encouraging her/him to separate the error in judgment from defining who s/he is as a person; and
- Reinforcing the support that close friends and family can provide in helping her/him get through it.

Self/peer exploitation incidents can carry criminal implications for the youth who produce, possess, and/or distribute the content. Depending on the nature of the images/videos, it may constitute child pornography under the Criminal Code (Canada). While the mass majority of self/peer exploitation incidents are addressed as a social problem, it is highly recommended that schools consult with their school-based police officers when dealing with these situations. In Manitoba, legislation mandates the reporting of child pornography to Cybertip.ca, Canada’s tipline for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children.

School-based police officers can be an important resource in dealing with self/peer exploitation situations when there is uncertainty whether a criminal act has taken place (i.e. extortion, criminal harassment, etc.), and/or when the police officer can be of help in conveying the seriousness of the incident to the acting-out youth and/or her/his parents. Schools should separate the issue of self/peer exploitation from that of youth sharing sexual content with adults. These cases should be immediately referred to local law enforcement (and where possible, to a specialized child exploitation unit).

When dealing with self/peer exploitation incidents, considering the following do’s and don’t’s:

Do’s :

- Do protect the privacy of the affected youth as much as possible. Only involve people on a need-to-know basis.
- Do support the affected youth by checking in to see how s/he is doing throughout the process.
- Do remain objective by focusing on the facts. Personal feelings, prejudices or interpretations should not be a part of the complaint follow-up process.
- Do encourage confidentiality when speaking with the affected youth,

acting-out youth, other involved youth, and their parents.

- Do empower the affected youth by letting her/him know that s/he will get through this.
- Do consult police when the situation with the acting-out youth involves malicious intent.
- Do encourage the acting-out youth to reflect and learn from the mistake. Focus on the repair of social injury/damage.
- Do encourage restorative justice—main considerations should include having youth self-assess their behaviour, how it affects others, and learning from mistakes.
- Do ensure an ongoing dialogue in the school about this issue and the potential impact.

Don’t’s :

- Don’t be judgmental.
- Don’t blame the affected youth for what has occurred.
- Don’t minimize or inflate the potential impact on the affected youth involved.
- Don’t suspend the affected youth.
- Don’t treat the acting-out youth who sent the images like a villain, but rather as a youth who has made a mistake that s/he needs to make amends for. Suspending the acting-out youth should only be considered when intense intervention is required.
- Don’t make assumptions about the intent behind the behaviour of the acting-out youth or other involved youth. There is a big difference between being immature (upset and impulsive) versus being deliberate (angry with the intent to hurt).
- Don’t try to remedy the issue by advocating that a simple apology from the acting-out youth will address the situation.



If we are really going to make a difference in reducing and even preventing self/peer exploitation, education is critical. Providing youth with a standard of measure for how they deserve to be treated, the public nature of the Internet, and information on respectful and healthy relationships can impact the decisions that youth make with their peers when creating, sharing, and/or sending sexual images.

Schools can proactively address the issue of self/peer exploitation by developing and implementing written sanctions against self/peer exploitation incidents under a school's Internet Use Policy or within the school's Code of Conduct that includes educating youth and parents that this type of activity will not be tolerated. This may include the following:


- A succinct definition of self/peer exploitation along with a statement denouncing this type of activity.

- A strong statement that encourages positive peer relationships and opposes harassment/bullying of any member within the school environment.
- A statement about the rights of individuals and groups to be free of victimization by others.
- A statement flagging the responsibility of peers to stop and/or report concerns of self/peer exploitation.
- A general outline of the steps a school will take in addressing incidents of self/peer exploitation.
- A plan for ongoing evaluation of the Internet Use Policy and/or Code of Conduct in addressing incidents of self/peer exploitation.

To assist schools, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has developed prevention material such as texted.ca and child development information sheets at kidsintheknow.ca. In October 2012, the

Canadian Centre will also be launching needhelpnow.ca, a site designed to support youth dealing with this issue. As well, a new resource guide providing a framework for educators and families managing self/peer exploitation will be made available across Canada.

While most self/peer exploitation incidents occur outside of the school environment, there is no question that youth can be negatively impacted within the school setting. In the same way that learning institutions have developed response plans to bullying, self/peer exploitation incidents and their impact on the school environment should be addressed. School personnel require the tools to take the necessary steps to better protect youth and to limit the harm done by images being created and shared among peers. When dealing with these situations, schools need to



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Signy Arnason is the Director of Cybertip.ca, a program of the Canadian Center for Child Protection and Noni Classen is the Director of Education at the Canadian Center for Child Protection.



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Multidisciplinary Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA): The Missing Link in Violence Prevention

By Kevin Cameron

What do you do when a “good student” is also rumoured to have threatened to kill another student in the washroom at school? Or a student with special needs who has a long-standing history of behavioural concerns starts drawing graphic pictures depicting violence towards his teacher? Why do some students get inducted into organized and disorganized youth gangs (rural and urban) while others can successfully withstand even “forced recruitment”?

How can you tell if a student who makes a threat of violence really poses a threat of violence? Why do some students never use weapons while others are prepared and in possession of some type of weapon on a regular basis? What should you do when an authored or anonymous “hit list” is found?

The answers to these questions start with “do not do it yourself.” Too many professionals, from all fields, are engaging in “unilateral assessments” where non-structured interviews with the student in question are conducted without seeking appropriate background information. The level of risk (low-moderate-high) is being immediately determined without relevant data and the level of risk is mostly influenced by how the interviewer (principal, vice principal, counsellor, police, psychologist, etc.) “feels” about the student rather than assessing the real data and the dynamics that may contribute to a violent act.

From single victim attacks of students, threats to teachers, and youth gang violence, to high profile school shootings, or the threat-making behaviour of students to do such, the standard of practice

is clear: data driven assessments trump “guessing” whether or not you think they will do it. We have consistently seen that “under reaction” to blatant signs and indicators that someone is moving on a pathway to violence continues to be the biggest barrier to preventing serious violence.



Overview

Eight days after the Columbine school shooting, I led the crisis response during the 1999 school shooting incident in Taber, Alberta. In concert with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Behavioural Sciences Unit, we developed Canada’s first comprehensive, multidisciplinary Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) training program for the prevention of serious violence.

Multidisciplinary VTRA teams consist, at a minimum, of school administrators, counsellors (social workers, psychologists, etc.) and police of jurisdiction who activate a formal protocol and process for data collection related to the above types of cases. VTRA data, often collected in one hour or less by the team, helps to

determine if there is evidence of immediate risk and plan for any risk reducing intervention. When indicated, VTRA trained mental health, child protection, probation, hospital staff and others are utilized for further multidisciplinary collaboration around more comprehensive risk evaluation. All of the service providers noted are jointly trained in the VTRA model to both develop a common language around threat/risk assessment and to increase consistency among the different professions who participate in violence prevention, assessment, and intervention practice.

Trained teams work from the perspective that “serious violence is an evolutionary process” and therefore no one “just snaps.” Pre-incident data is often available that can help school administrators, counselors, police of jurisdiction, mental health, child protection, and others to intervene and prevent serious violence as well as to plan more comprehensive interventions. The missing link has been real collaboration among the above agencies for both data collection (information sharing) and planning truly multidisciplinary interventions.

In the past, if a student was in possession of a weapon at school or uttered a threat to kill it was common for either the school to treat it as a disciplinary matter only or for the police to be called and the student charged; the case would be dealt with as a legal matter only. The problem is that cases that should have had a VTRA component to them were assumed to have been resolved by the disciplinary act of suspending the student from school and/or charging the student. Multidisciplinary VTRA, with its emphasis on data collection, is also referred to as the “missing link” in violence prevention because several students, within minutes

to hours of their suspension from school or charges being laid, returned to their schools or communities and sought out their target(s), some tragically.

Collecting evidence to justify a charge and secure a conviction is not the same as determining if someone actually poses a risk to the target they have threatened. By engaging in the multidisciplinary VTRA data gathering process we are able to collect sufficient information (often within one to two hours) to determine the current level of risk, which will guide any necessary immediate risk reducing interventions as well as plan for more comprehensive risk assessment and intervention as needed.

History of Violence Threat and Risk Assessment in Schools

In 1999, the U.S. Secret Service, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, began to expand on the practice of Threat Assessment (initially developed to protect the President of the United States) to encompass assessing threats to schools—in particular, school shootings. The Secret Service identified the need for more data driven assessments that moved beyond predicting the likelihood that someone may pose a risk of violence in general to determining if an individual poses a risk to the specific target they have threatened.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation emphasized a four-pronged model that included 1) personality of the student; 2) family dynamics; 3) school dynamics; and 4) social dynamics. The model highlighted that, while there may be some static variables that can contribute to violence risk, there are many dynamic variables that can be risk enhancing but are more controllable as risk reducers once identified.

Both agencies, with their perspectives on Threat Assessment, support the multidisciplinary approach of education, mental health, and law enforcement in the prevention of school shootings. However, the VTRA model is an integration of these law enforcement approaches with a human systems approach that addresses all forms of serious violence.

The new model of Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) is the first to pull together the practice of threat assessment, more commonly linked to school

shooting prevention, and the practice of forensic or general violence risk assessment, which has been used by practitioners for decades as it relates to most other forms of violence. Neither practice on their own has been sufficient to address the complex needs of the developing child within the context of schools. Serious violence is evolutionary but it is contextual and the interacting dynamics of the individual, family, school, and peer groups can be more complex than just assuming the child needs “anger management counselling.” Therefore, the VTRA model highlights both traditional and non-traditional risk enhancing variables.

This means that teams consider research driven (traditional or statistically significant) risk enhancers along with the often more important unique circumstances (non-traditional risk enhancers) that allows multidisciplinary VTRA teams to make an actual determination of current risk for harm to self or others. This allows them to plan a comprehensive data driven intervention based on data directly related to the case rather than relying solely on a statistical probability of risk. Identifying the likelihood of violence is not the same as violence prevention and intervention. VTRA does both.

Practice

As noted, trained VTRA teams work from the perspective that “serious violence is an evolutionary process” and therefore no one “just snaps,” and secondarily, pre-incident data is often available that can help school administrators, counselors, police of jurisdiction and others intervene and prevent serious violence. Yet, not everyone moves along the same evolutionary pathway. Some individuals have clear escalating patterns of violent offending so that when they “finally” kill someone, those who know the perpetrator are not surprised. Others, however, can shock their entire community by seemingly going from a model citizen to killing their spouse, co-worker, or classmate. In the latter example, it may be that those close to the perpetrator were not aware of his or her double life while in other cases the surprise is warranted as the incident may be the perpetrator’s first act of violence.

So, what is the difference? Some perpetrators evolve behaviorally with increasing frequency and intensity of violence over the years while others evolve cognitively and emotionally so that the frequency and intensity of their thinking and feeling (fantasies) about violence evolve over the months and years until their first violent act. Whatever the pathway, most people give signs and indicators that VTRA teams are trained to look for.

In the school context, if a student utters or communicates a clear and plausible threat to kill, school administrators, counselors, and others are trained to automatically look for any indication of planning from evidence that the threat maker has engaged in behavior consistent with their threat, to the writing of stories, drawing pictures, or making vague statements about their thoughts and intentions of committing serious violence.

The police members of the team are trained to show an interest in the student’s police contact history that may indicate escalation, as VTRA teams are trained to distinguish between “typical baseline” behavior and “shifting baseline” behavior that suggests evolution or escalation. By engaging in the multidisciplinary VTRA data gathering process, we are able to collect sufficient information to determine current level of risk, which will guide any necessary immediate risk reducing interventions as well as plan for more comprehensive risk assessment and intervention as needed.

However, the only way we have been able to work effectively and at a higher level in assessment and intervention is by jointly training the key agencies and disciplines together, and by developing joint multidisciplinary/multiagency protocols. From coast to coast there are multiple signed protocols and agreements for VTRA teams that include school districts, police detachments and services, child protection and mental health agencies, youth probation, and others to address how and when information will be shared and under what circumstances so that school superintendents and administrators do not need to “roll the dice” as

to whether or not we call the police or child protection, and wondering, "What response will we get this time?" The complaint that we, in the educational system share the information but no one shares with us, is resolved with the formally ratified protocol.

Conclusion

The Canadian developed VTRA model focuses on three distinct yet seamless stages of multidisciplinary Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) and intervention.

Stage I, which is referred to as "data collection and immediate risk reducing intervention," is performed at a minimum by the school-based team that includes the school principal, school-based clinician, and the police of jurisdiction.

Stage II, which is referred to as multidisciplinary risk evaluation, can involve some or all of the following: police-based threat assessment units, psychology, psychiatry, mental health, child protection, youth probation, and others. It is focused on further data collection beyond the initial data set obtained by the Stage I Team. The Stage II members are then charged (in collaboration with the Stage I team) with the formal risk assessment and evaluation, which may include the use of tests and measures.

Stage III is the formal meeting of either the Stage I and/or II members following an acceptable assessment/evaluation for the "development and implementation of a comprehensive multidisciplinary intervention." This step is often missed, and school and community service providers, and too many cases, have occurred where we, in the school setting, have been told someone is high risk or moderate risk, but we are given no real plan. VTRA answers the too frequently asked question "so what now?" with

a team plan that addresses immediate concerns as well as plans for lasting intervention that prevent children and youth from falling through the noted cracks in some of our past broken systems. ■

J. Kevin Cameron is the Executive Director for the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response, and is a Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress with the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress.

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TEACH don't BAN

Chocolate fundraisers support the spirit of school food and beverage policies. Here's why...

Teaching works, banning doesn't.

91% of adults agree that teaching about how treats fit into a healthy lifestyle is better than banning chocolate fundraising¹.

Common sense and behavioural science support that treats are part of a healthy active lifestyle.

92% of dietitians say that people are more likely to maintain a balanced lifestyle when they don't deprive themselves of treats².

In the world of treats, chocolate is one of the healthier options.

Eaten in moderation, chocolate has many benefits. It's rich in antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamins and minerals, and contains valuable calcium and iron.

Chocolate could lower your risk for heart disease!

British Medical Journal Research: The study, involving more than 114,000 people, showed that higher consumption levels of all types of chocolate, was significantly associated with a reduced risk of cardiometabolic disorders. This beneficial association was significant for cardiovascular disease (**37% reduction**), diabetes (**31%**) and stroke (**29%**)³. Chocolate might be a viable instrument in the prevention of cardiometabolic disorders if consumed in moderation.

The launch of a chocolate fundraiser is an opportunity to teach kids about healthy lifestyles and World's Finest® Chocolate can help:



Teaching material to help educate children on the importance of portion control and physical activity. Available with each fundraising campaign.

A chocolate fundraiser supports active lifestyles, not unhealthy eating.

This annual or semi-annual event helps pay for school activities and equipment like playground equipment, sports equipment, bussing and school trips that support healthy, active lifestyles.

For more information call 1.800.461.1957



¹ September 2010 Ipsos poll of 1,000+ adults (including 500 parents of children aged 6-11)
² Survey of Registered Professionals: An online survey of 430 registered dietitians (RDs) by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
³ "British Medical Journal", chocolate consumption and cardiovascular diseases: 7 studies involving 114,000 people, studies up to Dec 2010



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