

PURPOSE OF SEMPER FIDELIS

Semper Fidelis is a community forum of Christian educators united by a shared mission. Semper Fidelis will serve as a catalyst to stimulate and encourage passionate educators.

# semper fidelis

THE *official* NEWSLETTER OF EDIFIDE

MEMBER *Spotlight*

Harry Blyleven  
Hamilton District Christian High  
Ancaster, Ontario



## Project Based Learning (PBL)

### THE AUTHENTIC TASKS AND NATURE HONOUR STUDENTS

Upon completing a business and physical education degree from Redeemer College, I attended Lakehead University for my education degree. In my almost 20 years of teaching, (a year and a half with the former Haldimand Board of Education and 19 years at Hamilton District Christian High), it has been challenging, eye opening, and rewarding to work with students and other teachers as together we refine the craft of teaching. At HDCH, the subjects that I most often teach are computer technology, computer programming, and math. These are engaging subjects for me to teach since they are continually changing as new tools, resources, and curriculum are constantly produced.

It is exciting for me to see how learning, for both the student and the teacher-learner, is ever changing and developing. One thing that I appreciate most about working in and with Christian schools and Edifide is that these organizations have excellent professionals who reflect upon how to better understand, help, and care for students in a learning context. Our schools have the opportunity to be proactive in terms of how quickly we can respond to educational trends and changes that improve student learning. Project Based Learning (PBL) is one such change that many

of our schools are having conversations about. This is an exciting form of instruction for me, and I have had several incredible professional development opportunities by adopting this model. I have been able to connect with educators from around the globe through attendance at the PBLWorld conferences in 2012 and 2013, through social media, and through workshops that I have participated in. I have also spent much time researching, implementing, coaching, and reflecting on PBL through my classroom work and as I complete my Masters of Education at Lakehead University.

In my career, PBL has been the teaching method that I most enjoy using and the one through which I feel I am best able to truly help my students learn. The authentic tasks and the nature of projects honour my students with learning experiences that are meaningful and productive. By using PBL, my students are better able to demonstrate and show me what they love to do.

In our classrooms and in our personal learning we are not alone. Learning is a result of community and the important people around us. My wife, Kim, and my son, Tae, have been incredibly encouraging and supportive as I continue my journey in education. It is my hope that I can model their support in my instruction.



## My Journey Towards Project Based Learning (PBL)

by Laurence Stassen

London Christian Elementary School



PBL has been on my mind for a long time already. Initially, I heard about it at an Edifide convention and felt an excitement about teaching that had been eluding me for some time. I decided that day that I would begin to incorporate PBL units into my teaching as soon as possible, maybe by the New Year! But I think it was a good two years before I actually got started. I kept trying to come up with project ideas that would result in a real and preferably professional product, which hopefully fulfilled a need in the community and craved an audience! Ideas developed but vanished again when I could not visualize them through to completion. I took more workshops and scoured [www.bie.org](http://www.bie.org).

Last year I decided to leap even if I couldn't get it all planned from beginning to end. Instead of my usual ecology unit, I showed a video that impressed us with the beauty of creation but also detailed the devastation that people are causing in it. My students felt they had received a wakeup call and wanted to do something about it. I was excited because I had just had a successful launch event. To make a long story short, we ended up inviting the community in for an eco-fair. Knowing the community would observe our work really raised the stakes. The students wanted to be knowledgeable and well-prepared. In the end, we had a lot of things on the go.

We had a website, a music video, the results of interviews with students in other grades, booths with information and visuals, information on how to "adopt" endangered animals, camera feeds from the San Diego Zoo, and an online survey to assess how well we got our message out. One group of students even took their booth to a mall and handed out pamphlets. Did they learn? Yes. Were they engaged? Yes. Did they have fun? Yes! So, were there any downsides? As it turns out, my students were not as familiar with the unit vocabulary (words such as "communities" and "energy pyramid") as they should have been. I think we traded off detailed knowledge in favour of big picture thinking.

My next unit was on heat, and I had a volunteer take us to an old home with an infra-red

camera. We figured out where the home needed further insulating and then went to Home Depot to learn about the best choice of insulation for this application. One group made a model of the basement using Google SketchUp so that we could plan construction and calculate how much material was needed. Another group wrote up a formal proposal as to what needed to be done. Other students worked with Excel and produced a spreadsheet of costs. At the end, we invited the home owner into our class and presented our proposal to him. This time, I was more careful to keep all the details of kinetic molecular theory in the curriculum.

This summer, I attended the three-day workshop that was put on by the Buck Institute as part of the Edifide Summer Institute. This seminar gave me the chance to go through the eight essentials of PBL in detail. Since the Buck Institute really developed PBL, it was helpful to hear about it straight from the horse's mouth. It was also a good review of pedagogy in general as we worked with a variety of teaching and learning strategies.

At present, I am playing with a Raspberry Pi. This is a small computer—barely larger than a credit card—that can be purchased for about \$35.00. You can program it to send voltages out to a series of pins to get things done in the real world. I'm toying with using this to teach programming, and then letting the students develop project ideas for this device. A possible idea might be getting a diode to blink out Morse code for a sentence you type in. They would have to write original code to do it, and I'm not certain yet whether that will prove realistic with a grade 7 class. If this happens, we would then have students exhibit their projects to the community. For now I'm continuing to research, but hope to be back doing PBL again soon!

*Laurence Stassen teaches grade 7 at Ottawa Christian School where he also serves as computer coordinator and VP. He is happily married to his beautiful wife Mary Ann, and has twin girls in grade 4 and a younger girl in grade 2. The 3 girls and Laurence go to and from school together each day. His long term goals are to stream line their computer network, to grow in his application of PBL and to continue to foster a restorative culture at his school.*

## Re-Imagining Edifide . . . . . A Blueprint for Our Future Strategic Plan 2014-2018

At this year's convention, we are "Re-Imagining Education" through presentations by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre on "Stewards of Stories" and by Justin Cook on "See through Blind Bartimaeus' Eyes: Learning for Inward and Outward Flourishing." We wonder and dream about how to best love and serve the students with whom we work.

The Board of Directors of **edifide** has also been wondering and dreaming about how best to serve Christian educators. In 2008, the Board of Directors started those reflections and discussions. Initially, we developed our mission and vision for the future, replaced our association's name (OCSTA-Ontario Christian School Teacher Association) with **edifide** to better reflect our purpose. We developed a fresh and contemporary look poised for the future and developed a newsletter entitled *Semper Fidelis*. That was the beginning.

In the fall of 2012, we embarked on discussions around the development of a strategic plan for **edifide** that would take us through the next four years.

A Blueprint for Our Future 2014-2018 summarizes the initial discussions at the Board. The strategic planning process sets out to examine our existing strengths, weaknesses, potential threats, and the opportunities we have before us. It also establishes formal high level goals under our current mission and vision, sets out tangible strategies or actions to reach these goals, and explores how we might measure success in meeting our targets:

- to outline the issues, challenges, and opportunities **edifide** faces and how best to manage them now and in the future;
- to inform educators and members of what actions the Board will take over the next four years to make our mission and vision a reality;
- to demonstrate to our affiliates and Christian communities our commitment to Christian education and educators;

- to provide the Board and **edifide**'s membership with an accountability framework whereby the membership can regularly monitor the success of the Board in implementing the strategic plan; and to provide **edifide** with actions and ideas to effectively market the organization to new and prospective members, affiliates, and the larger education community; and
- to raise professionalism within the **edifide** membership.

An important next step in the implementation of this plan is the development of an action document. This entails assigning committees, working groups, collaboration tables, and **edifide** staff with specific strategies to make this plan a reality. It is our intention that the appropriate committees and staff will regularly report back to the Board on their progress. The Board will continually evaluate the success in meeting the stated goals, regularly update the strategic plan, and commit to apprise members of developments.

A copy of the entire document **A Blueprint for Our Future** will be available at Workshop 5:17 Re-Imagining **edifide**! **edifide**'s Strategic Plan Moving Forward. It will also be available from your **edifide** Reps as well as on our website. Over the next number of months, members will have the opportunity to give their input, ideas, and responses. See our e-newsletters for further information.

For the **edifide** Board, **Diane Stronks**

**MISSION:**  
To enlighten, equip and encourage Christian educators.

**VISION:**  
A vibrant, stimulating community of Christian educators on the leading edge of new ideas and best practices.



## What Are (Were) You THINKING?

by Diane Stronks

In the last while, I have been doing some thinking about thinking. I know this may sound crazy to some of you (it certainly does to some of my friends and my family), but it is something that I love to do. I relish the time to take ideas and look at them, ponder them, and play with them.

I remember, however, my mother saying to me more than once, "What were you THINKING?!" when I had been unruly or unkind or rude. And usually there was no good answer to that question. Most often I hadn't been thinking; I had just been doing. I now know that habits and patterns flow out of a philosophy or a way of thinking. And so, we need to attend not only to our thinking but also to our doing and feeling. Nevertheless, each of us as educators obviously value thinking, thought, and mind development.

The irony is that, though we tend to value thoughts and ideas, many of us don't want to be personally challenged in our own ways of thinking. We don't like it when someone asks us "Why?" or "What were you thinking?" because sometimes we don't have an answer. We just did or thought things because that is the way we have always done them or thought about them.

One struggle that Christian educators, parents, and community members have is how to avoid believing that there is only one way to think about things and, by extension, how to avoid indoctrination. When we cannot abide questions or explorations of any kind of thinking that conflict with our beliefs, are we not in danger of indoctrination? Can we find a place where other people's questions do not make us defensive (because we don't want to be challenged on what we do, say, or think) or fearful (because we don't know how to answer the question) or angry

(because we feel threatened)? We are in the educational business of creating communities where questions (any questions) ought to be legitimate. Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves if our faith is robust enough to withstand the questions that are asked.

And perhaps, "I don't know" is actually a good answer. "Why don't you research that question?" is another good answer. "Let's talk about this" is yet another fine response. In fact, these answers might be good responses to all our questions: Why do we do things the way that we do them? Why is there so much violence in the world? Why doesn't God do something about sickness, poverty, war? Why do we exist? Who is my neighbor? Are there alternative ideas expressed about this controversial issue? What are they? Can I make sense of any of them?

Education needs to be about knowledge, wisdom, and discernment but also embodiment. How can I live out the answers that I have to life's most important questions?

A community of Christian educators who are committed to asking really good questions without necessarily answering all of them, or even without answering them in the same way, can be a place of great hospitality, great refreshment, and hopefully, great thinking!

I welcome you to the 2013 Edifide Convention and hope that your thinking will be challenged and that you will be blessed as you participate in the robust conversations about the future of Christian education and how we might re-imagine education together!

Shalom,  
Diane



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