

# VANIER ACADEMIC VOICES

Volume 2, Issue 1

January 2019

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College Students:  
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## Editor's Note

Due to an abundance of fantastic content in this issue, we lacked the space required for a longer editor's note. Please permit me, in very few words, to extend my gratitude to all contributors who generously devoted their creative energies to making this third issue of *Vanier Academic Voices* as dynamic and thought-provoking as previous editions. Thank you also to all of our readers: as we begin a new year and a new semester, I hope that the ideas shared in these pages will inspire you. Happy reading!

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# The Developmental Context of Today's College Students: A Psychological Perspective

In my experience, conversations with fellow colleagues from a variety of programs often lead to discussions and analyses of “today’s” college students. I frequently hear statements along the lines that students today are “less engaged” than previous cohorts, “more obsessed” with their cell phones, and simply “less interested” in learning. Sometimes we may joke with each other that it’s us getting older, that we are becoming more detached from understanding the youth of today. In reality, though, students today are growing up in a different world from us, in the same way that our world was different from our older siblings, our parents and our grandparents. Each generation grows up in different environmental contexts that in turn lead to distinctive developmental trajectories—the results of which we get to see firsthand in our classrooms. In this article, I want to highlight some of the changes in our students’ environments, primarily due to the pervasiveness of portable technology, and how these changes create both challenges and new opportunities for today’s students. As teachers, how can we use this knowledge to adapt our teaching style and classrooms to something this generation of students can relate to and benefit from?

One way to consider the lives of today’s students is through Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) *Ecological Systems Theory* (cited in Kail & Zolner, 2015). According to this perspective, a person’s development is influenced by the interplay of various contexts and environments, called ecological systems. Some of these systems are experienced daily (i.e., the microsystems, such as family, school, and peers) and therefore are anticipated to exert a strong influence on the developing person. In contrast, the exosystems (e.g., parent workplace, community centres) are contexts not necessarily experienced directly or as often, but still have the potential to impact the developing person. For example, if a parent must work overtime or has been laid off, exosystemic factors will likely impact his or her role at home and in family relationships.

While it is the case that each generation of students grows up with its own set of ecological systems, I would argue that one clear difference for today’s students is the extent to which technology, especially portable devices like smartphones, has permeated every environmental context described in Bronfenbrenner’s theory. They certainly are a big part of students’ microsystems. As we have all noticed, smartphones accompany our students everywhere they go—school, home, work—and are used to interact with peers, friends and parents. While these microsystems have always been important for youth, the key difference for students today is that contact with these microsystems can now occur all of the time. Previous generations might have had most of their contact with parents and family after school and in the evenings, but now, students can keep in constant contact even during school hours. There are no more “built-in” breaks from one microsystem to another. This can create more open communication between family members; however, consider the implications of a student who no longer can take a break from their peers. A student who is being bullied at school, for instance, can still be bullied after school, online and through social media.

These examples also illustrate how the interplay between microsystems (i.e., the mesosystems) has changed. For example, teachers post readings, assignments, and grades that students can access at home via their smartphones. Even at younger age levels, the communication between teachers and parents is no longer limited to parent-teacher nights—there are several apps available specifically designed to help teachers keep families informed of their child’s progress. Of course this can allow for greater involvement of parents in their child’s academic pursuits; however, it does change the dynamic for this mesosystem as it may transfer some of the educational responsibilities that traditionally were handled by students (e.g., asking a teacher for help) to parents, potentially reducing students’ obligation to take active responsibility for their learning.

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Photo credit Brandon Calder

Smartphone technology has also permeated our exosystems. In Figure 1, we see mass media represented as part of the exosystem; however, I think most of us would agree that this has changed as access to music, TV, movies, books, and magazines is now at a one's fingertips at all times. As teachers, we have to compete with the appeal of YouTube and Netflix for our students' attention in our classrooms. Knowledge and access to information about our exosystems and macrosystems has also changed—webcams, 24-hour news channels, and Twitter feeds now provide students with a view to their world from anywhere and at anytime. Therefore, the blurring of lines between the various contexts and environments in which our students' grow up has significantly changed with more personal and constant access to technology. This can create a plethora of new opportunities for our students, but it can also create more distractions and challenges. Both of these possibilities have the potential to affect the developing person.

What does all of this mean for adolescent and young adult development? Psychologists tend to consider a person's development according to different domains—physical, cognitive, and social/emotional. In terms of physical development, studies have documented an association between screen time and poor health outcomes, such as obesity and lack of exercise (cited in Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Youth are sleep-deprived, and being distracted by their phones is cited as a common cause. According to one study, 80% of teenagers sleep with their cell phones or place them in proximity to their beds (cited in Solecki & Fay-Hillier, 2015). Sleep deprivation increases

irritability and negative mood; it also negatively impacts cognitive abilities, which in turn diminishes students' academic performance.

Cognitively, one's attention span and concentration levels, as well as on one's ability to multitask and problem-solve, are all negatively affected by increased screen time (Solecki & Fay-Hillier, 2015). This has implications for learning as new memories can only be formed if they are encoded properly. Paying attention is an essential step in the encoding process. In other words, if students are not paying attention in class or as they engage with course readings, proper encoding does not take place. This means that forming, storing and retrieving new memories will not take place. Effort is required to learn new material, and many educators are concerned that today's students are less curious, put in less effort, and are learning material more shallowly than in previous generations due to all the distractions surrounding them as they learn (Solecki & Fay-Hillier, 2015).

In particular, there is concern for how screen time impacts social/emotional development. Because forming, building, and maintaining social connections has progressively moved to online platforms, youth today tend to spend less face-to-face time with their family members and friends than did previous generations. The opportunity for online friendships can be beneficial for some (e.g., youth who live in rural areas, or for youth with particular interests to find like-minded peers); however, longitudinal studies have found correlations between time on social media and an increase in mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Flora, 2018; Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

According to a nationally representative survey of U.S. adolescents over the period of 2010 to 2015, adolescents who spent more time on smartphones (especially on social media) were twice as likely to have received diagnoses of depression or anxiety and needed treatment for mental or behavioral health conditions (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2018). For adolescent girls in particular, high smartphone use was associated with an increase in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates (Twenge et al., 2018).

In Canada, whether it be from smartphone use or not, there are similar concerns over the number of postsecondary students struggling with mental health issues. Forty-one Canadian postsecondary institutions participated in a recent survey with approximately 44,000 students responding; the survey found that 20% of Canadian postsecondary students are depressed and anxious or battling other mental health issues, which was an increase from a study conducted only three years earlier (Chiose, 2016). Some schools across the country have created a “fall break”, similar to the midterm winter break, to try and address concerns about students’ mental health (Campbell, 2015).

***As teachers, we need to consider our students’ overall development, as well as their strengths and challenges, and adapt our teaching styles and classrooms to these changing needs and learning styles.***

What is clear from these studies is that certain forms of smartphone use are challenging today’s students in ways that are different from previous generations. The effects are experienced in all domains of the developing person. Young people’s ability to manage time, to emotionally cope with stress, and to deal with distractions encountered each day on their smartphones can be a struggle.

*“I think they are exposed to more stress potentially than in the past. With more time to question and explore identities, this requires having to live with more uncertainty. I also see students trying to juggle too much - the pressures of school, jobs, relationships, family life, etc. I also think they have more uncertainty today in terms of what they want to do with their futures.”* —Peter Gantous, Psychology teacher

It is important to note that several applications of smartphone use can create new outlets and opportunities for students. Many teachers have found innovative ways to include smartphones as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, creating inclusive new teaching practices. Others have demonstrated that there are many online resources to help youth struggling with personal issues (Flora, 2018). Access to a multitude of sources of information can help students become more flexible, adaptable and open-minded than previous generations.

It has been suggested that today’s college students hold higher beliefs of equality (in terms of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) than previous generations (Twenge, 2013).

*“I think today’s college student has more diversity of experience and information available to them than past years. They have to make decisions about their identity, roles and relationships, which are becoming less weighted down than previous years by the requirements of their parents. They have to navigate the relatively new identities including ethnic, Montreal culture, sexual, romantic, academic, friendship, familial, occupational, etc. College students would have been fully independent adults in past years or in other cultures today; instead, our students delay this for the goal of a higher education and greater control and independence in the future. They are also optimistic about their chances of a fulfilling life.”* —Peter Gantous

What does this all mean for our classrooms, for student learning, and for our teacher practice? Certainly one challenge facing our classrooms is a posture of passivity from students. Whether it be from lack of sleep, or from changes in cognitive or social/emotional development, teachers have certainly noticed a change:

*“When I enter the class, it is quiet and dark, everyone on their own devices, no chatter. Ten years ago, I used to have to raise my voice, turn the lights off and on to get their attention in order to start the class. Students do not answer the questions I constantly throw out to them and sometimes the classroom is so quiet you can hear a pin drop. This atmosphere almost feels surreal. I can hear my own voice resonate in my head. It is demoralizing and zaps all of my energy and enthusiasm. I have to work really, really hard to get a rise out of them. Over the years, I have always experienced the odd class that was “quiet” but this was an anomaly. The past 3-4 years “quiet” classes seem to have become the norm and the “engaged” class is now the anomaly.”* —Lisa Millelire, Psychology teacher

*“Passivity is a main challenge for current students in the classroom and studying at home. Active learning implies engagement, such as taking notes while organizing and processing the material presented during a lecture and while reading a textbook. Students who engage with active learning approaches tend to learn and understand the course material better.”* —Nathalie Viau, Psychology teacher

What can teachers do? One option is to try to get students actually moving whenever possible. These days, students do not need to go anywhere to seek out information for school projects – it is all at their fingertips – so moving around and interacting with others can help get them out of their online “bubble.” It is also important to try and help students analyze the information they find online. As we know, not all news is “real,” and not all sources are credible. This can be overwhelming, so students need guidance navigating the world of Google and Wikipedia. With the tendency for students to be more passive in the classroom (i.e., fewer questions and less discussion) along with more demands than ever on their time, we need to show

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students why coming to class is important. They need to see how each course they take, and even how each subject they study in a course, fits into an overall plan.

*“Students don’t always see a means to an end—they desire instant gratification.”*—Lisa Millelire

*“One of our retired teachers, Frank Winstan, used to leave for class with the phrase, “It’s showtime.” I think that with the multitude of information and entertainment sources out there, you have to grab the students’ attention. This includes using different styles of teaching and preparing for different styles of learners. Ultimately, teachers need to communicate their own genuine enthusiasm about their subject to engage with the students.”*—Peter Gantous

Students are also likely to benefit from frequent feedback on their progress. For better or for worse, they are used to receiving “likes” and comments on social media platforms, a phenomenon that has cultivated expectations of immediate feedback. Considering this prevailing trend and its impact on our culture, perhaps small, but more regular feedback from teachers might be helpful to today’s students (Twenge, 2013). Not only can students benefit from this feedback, but teachers might also want to take the time to elicit feedback from students about teaching methods and activities. For example, Lisa Millelire, a teacher in the Psychology Department, recently asked a class of her students why they thought class attendance was low in general, and why they seemed less engaged in the classroom. Students were pleasantly surprised to be asked about their ideas. Some comments included:

- No need to attend class when notes are posted on Omnivox. (They also complain of being barraged with Omnivox alerts—another source of being overwhelmed.)

- Students’ lives are too busy; we have to make choices of how to spend time.
- Poor quality of teaching - some teachers spend too much time talking about their personal experiences or teaching above students’ ability; no variety of teaching mediums.
- Course lecture deemed as not related to course topic, readings or posted notes—don’t see the relevance.

Certainly, the lives and minds of today’s students are different from our own generation. They are growing up in environmental contexts that have changed dramatically in recent years. As teachers, we need to consider our students’ overall development, as well as their strengths and challenges, and adapt our teaching styles and classrooms to these changing needs and learning styles.

*“We are in a transitional period: the generation that grew up with the internet in their pockets are now in our classrooms. With their help, we need to find new ways to engage and bring them back to life in the classroom.”*—Lisa Millelire



*Kelly Purdy*  
is coordinator of the  
Psychology department.

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# Can College be a Creative Environment? Reimagining our Teaching Practices

We need creative individuals to find solutions to the serious societal and environmental problems that humans are currently facing. Creativity has become a buzzword in the larger-than-life companies that lead in technological innovation, and job markets are constantly expressing their need for creative workers who can propose innovative approaches to grapple with new challenges. Creativity is an overarching concept that is also applicable to our personal lives: creative individuals might be better equipped to have more fulfilling life experiences than their less creative peers. There seems to be a consensus on the importance of creativity. It is like apple pie: everybody likes it, right?

*The abstract character of the visual arts can provide new insights and shed light on counterintuitive scientific concepts which stem from formal, conceptual structures that do not arise spontaneously in the everyday experiences of learners.*

If everyone agrees on the importance of creativity, why is it so difficult to incorporate it into our educational system? There are two pervasive ideas in education that abort the discussion at its inception. The first claims that creativity cannot be taught, instilled, nurtured, developed, or cultivated. The second purports that creativity is innate—either you have it, or you don't. Being an enthusiast of creativity and not believing that it is innate, I would like to share my experiences exploring it in science courses at Vanier. Though my journey is entirely personal, it is my hope that sharing it will provide food for thought to those who are interested in exploring such approaches in their teaching practice and that it will stimulate reflection among those who are curious about this fascinating topic.

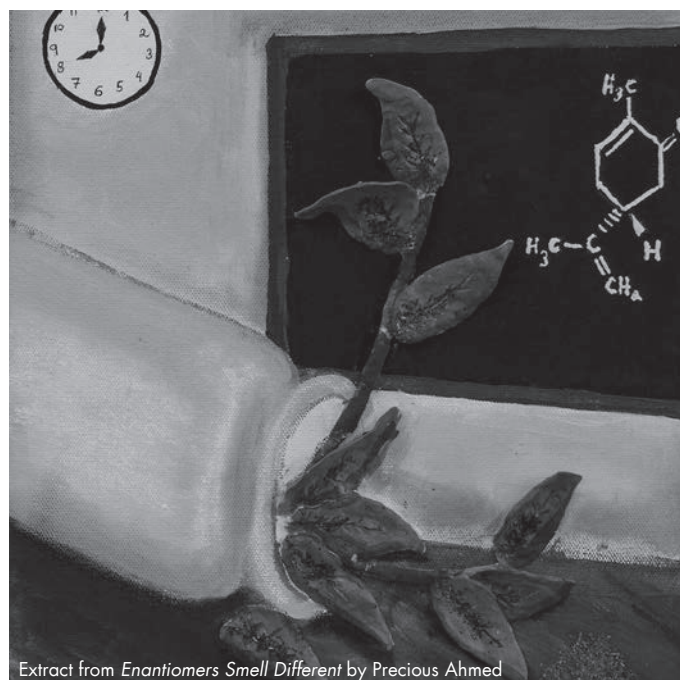
I was educated in Brazil, and I completed my graduate studies there in 1996. After teaching chemistry in Brazilian high schools and universities, I moved to Canada in 2000. I started working at Vanier in the summer of that year. After spending a few years adjusting to my new teaching environment, I felt a need to reinvent my teaching practice—mostly because I believed that there had to be better approaches than those that I was applying. I did not know exactly which direction this change would take me in until I read Kieran Egan's books on imaginative education (Egan, 1997; Egan, Stout, & Takaya, 2005). Although imagination and creativity are not synonymous, there is a link between the two. Creativity entails an interaction between attitude, process, and environment that leads to

the inception of something new and useful; but to create something, one first needs to *imagine* it. Imagination is the capacity to conceive of what does not yet exist, and creativity is applied imagination.

Egan and his peers at Simon Fraser University's Imaginative Education Research Group (IERG) emphasize the crucial role of the narrative in providing engagement to knowledge. "A narrative is a continuous account of a series of events or facts that shapes them into an emotionally satisfactory whole" (Egan, 2005, p. 99). They propose a counter-intuitive idea: instead of starting with what students *know*, we should start with what they can *imagine*. The idea that imagination can

open the doors of perception so that creativity and effective learning can occur resonated well with my own beliefs. During my childhood, I experienced the power of children's books that were full of animals that could talk; though, many of them—like dinosaurs—were long extinct, their adventures planted seeds of wonder in my mind, and my emotional engagement with the characters fostered learning.

During adolescence, I felt similar transcendence to imaginary worlds while reading the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and Ray Bradbury. Reading Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* was a transformative experience that initiated my lifelong



Extract from *Enantiomers Smell Different* by Precious Ahmed

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interest in astronomy, space exploration, and the natural sciences and that can still be seen in my teaching practice today (Lima, 2017). As a student, I often wondered why school had to be so boring, so mind-numbing, so depleted of the excitement that those imaginative experiences provided me.

Egan's writings showed me that a backlash against imagination is deeply entrenched in the ethos of Western thought. Literature on the topic traces resistance to the expression of imagination to Plato's works (Egan, Stout, & Takaya, 2007), and from them, its broad ramifications reach pedagogy through the works of, for example, the influential psychologist Jean Piaget (Egan, 1997). With the exception of those working in early childhood education, it seems that teachers (especially those in the natural sciences) have been trained to look down on imaginative approaches for students who are older than toddlers, as if imagination is inferior to rational, Cartesian thought. But time and again, imagination has transcended the educational milieu to become a defining characteristic of the human experience!

The combination of visual images and narratives can connect one's imagination and identity by carefully crafting a collection of intermingled narratives with suggestive, powerful images. No wonder graphic novels have legions of fans. Imagination can be a powerful tool to engage with a world in flux as we project our dreams and expectations into the future.

While starting to think about ways to bring the IERG's ideas to my practice at Vanier, I stumbled across Ken Robinson's ideas about the crucial role of creativity in education. With almost 54 million views so far, Robinson's TED talk *Do Schools Kill Creativity?* offers a critique of traditional schooling by emphasizing the necessity of rethinking a system that has historically valued the arts less than math and the natural sciences (Robinson, 2006). These ground-breaking ideas kept me thinking about the hurdles that I had to overcome to

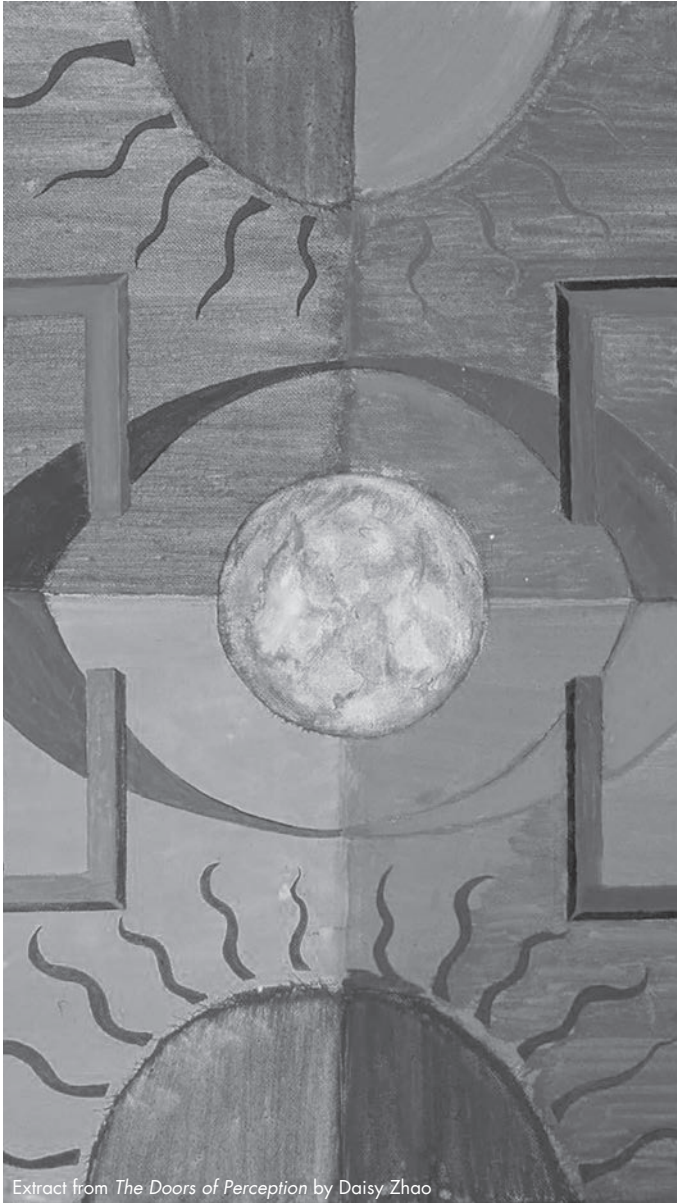
prepare a creative/imaginative environment for students in higher education. I did not want to surrender to the idea that most schools are doomed to be places that kill imagination, as Robinson claims.

The opportunity to incorporate creativity and imagination into my courses arose in 2009, the first time I taught *History and Methodology of Science*, a course for Liberal Arts students. Inspired by Egan and Robinson, I proposed a major assignment in which students used the visual arts to portray some of the scientific concepts studied in the course (Lima & Timm-Bottos, 2018). Over the years, I have tweaked the format by including asynchronous dialogues (Lima, 2016) outside the classroom to flesh out ideas and bring concepts to the expected level of complexity. I also felt the need to include art labs (Lima, 2017) and sought the participation of art teachers in the process (Lima & Timm-Bottos, 2018). After a couple of years working with Liberal Arts cohorts, I proposed a similar assignment in my General Chemistry, Solution Chemistry, and Organic Chemistry courses. Science students were asked to express the big ideas (Lima, 2016) and threshold concepts in chemistry through visual arts, and they were required to write a rationale explaining the links between the course content and the visual representations in their final products.

Although scientific knowledge relies heavily on mental models and their visual representations, traditional approaches to teaching science often neglect the crucial role of images in the learning process. Asking students to portray abstract chemical concepts such as atomic models, energy, or chemical bonding using visual representations might help them make the transition from abstract to concrete. The abstract character of the visual arts can provide new insights and shed light on counterintuitive scientific concepts which stem from formal, conceptual structures that do not arise spontaneously in the everyday experiences of learners. Instead of traditional assessments of learning that are commonly used in science courses, this type of student-centred pedagogy requires the development of authentic assessments for learning.







Extract from *The Doors of Perception* by Daisy Zhao

## ***Reflecting on how students construct knowledge in each specific discipline is a transformative experience for teachers.***

It is also an opportunity for students to become active in constructing their own knowledge by generating ideas and sharing them with peers. Achieving gains in conceptual understanding as the result of a process of discovery that is mediated by social interactions has been at the core of the frameworks presented in the grassroots works of Lev Vygotsky (Connery, John-Steiner, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010) and Paulo Freire (1998).

Teachers are expected to be lifelong learners, constantly challenged by exchanging ideas and practices with their peers. Reflecting on how students construct knowledge in each specific discipline is a transformative experience for teachers. This process involves purposeful

interaction, keen observation, multi-sensory exploration, “what if” questioning, connecting seemingly unrelated concepts to create new meaning, and constant self-reflection.

Creativity and imagination have countless facets and nuances. There is no one-size-fits-all recipe. Exploring imagination is exciting work, and it is never-ending. It offers the promise of transforming our schools to fulfill the needs of new generations of students. It is virtually impossible to predict what the world will look like even in the near future; however, it is safe to speculate that, regardless of what lies ahead, creative people will always be in demand.



*Jailson Lima*  
is a Chemistry teacher.



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# Two Healthcare Programs Collaborate to Develop a Simulation Program: Challenges and Unexpected Benefits

Simulated experiences for students in health care education programs have become a widespread and common practice. It is now evident that clinical simulation leads to effective learning and is associated with positive results in the acquisition of knowledge and skills and in patient outcomes. At Vanier College, acquisition of high fidelity simulators (HFS) had been on the capital acquisition “wish list” for the Nursing and Respiratory Therapy (RT) programs for several years. As a venture that is very costly, it quickly became apparent that in order to implement a viable simulation project at Vanier, the two programs would need to collaborate and share resources.

The journey towards completion of this joint project has not been without its trials and tribulations. An unanticipated benefit of the collaborative effort required, however, has produced positive outcomes for both programs.

## The Challenges

### *Recognizing professional “cultural” diversity*

The preparatory point in the discussion had to surround the nature, focus, and needs of each program. The Nursing program comprises a general Nursing curriculum while the RT program maintains a focus on critical and acute care medicine. These differences presented a monumental challenge for faculty of both programs as they began to plan for the project.

### *Differences in program operation*

At Vanier College, the Nursing program is three times the size of the Respiratory program. Priority for the use of the simulators by each program needed to be carefully considered.

Clinical placement in the RT program predominates in the third year, whereas the Nursing program incorporates clinical throughout their three-year program. Student schedules for the two programs are vastly different. The question of scheduling for simulation for the two programs needed to be deliberated and negotiated.

### *Space for the simulation labs*

The simulation labs had to be constructed within existing space. This meant that one program was going to have to relinquish some of their space. As the RT labs were more conducive to construction of a simulation lab (existing gas and vacuum piping), space from this program’s facilities was required. As a consequence, during construction, RT activities were frequently scheduled within the Nursing labs. A combined Nursing and RT student resource room had to be created from the original RT teacher lounge. This necessitated moving the



Photo credit Brandon Calder

RT teachers into the Nursing teachers’ lunchroom. Much discussion and collaboration was required.

### *Equipment purchase*

The features of the manikins and accessory equipment purchased needed to serve both programs. The long, arduous process of purchasing began with Nursing and RT faculty members working together on proposals to administrators and fundraisers; meeting with HFS suppliers; trialing different manikins; and entering a tendering process.

### Personnel

Hiring a shared simulation lab technician and establishing the job role that would work for both Nursing and RT needed to be considered. Funding from various sources was acquired by faculty from both programs in order to integrate simulation into the curriculum as a joint project. Faculty from both programs attended conferences and visited established simulation centers together.

### The Benefits

Collaboration is the cornerstone of success in any team. Interprofessional collaboration, where health care providers collaborate as equals, improves patient outcomes and quality of care.

Healthcare professional educational programs have a duty to prepare their students to work in collaborative clinical environments. To work effectively with other healthcare professionals, we must begin with the development of respect, insight and knowledge of each other's roles.

The Nursing and RT programs have existed on the same floor of the main building at Vanier College for over 46 years. For at least 42 of those years, despite a shared healthcare focus, each program functioned completely independently of the other. The majority of Nursing students had little or no knowledge of the role of an RT. RT students were equally unaware of the true role of the nurse. Faculty from each program may have been equally uninformed concerning their colleagues in the other program. Teachers and students alike never crossed the imaginary line that separated the departments.

***The collaborative associations with other health care professionals established while our students study in our programs will endure in the professional lives of our graduates.***

Implementation of a high fidelity simulation program has had a profound effect on the sense of cooperation and communication between our two programs. The shared facilities – simulation labs, the Nursing and RT student resource room, and the Nursing and RT faculty lounge – have fostered in all of us an appreciation for the fact that opportunities for collaborative learning extend well beyond the interactions inherent in interprofessional clinical simulation. Second-year RT students now lead a lab on airway suctioning for third-year Nursing students. Other cooperative activities have included Code Blue scenarios – with RT students engaging in a simulated advanced cardiovascular life support (ACLS) scenario. In addition to joint clinical simulation activities, joint lab sessions are planned in which Nursing students support RT students' patient assessment skills.

Developing a simulation project with another program has not been without its challenges. Compromise had to be made in so many areas; negotiation continues to be at the forefront of all discussions pertaining to the simulation project. Aspects of this shared project have led, however, to a new paradigm of collaborative teaching in the Nursing and RT programs at Vanier College. It is our belief that the collaborative associations with other health care professionals established while our students study in our programs will endure in the professional lives of our graduates.



**Patricia McClurg**  
is coordinator of the Respiratory and Anaesthesia Technology program.



**Antoinette Coccio**  
is coordinator of the Nursing program.

### To Learn More

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## The Malawi Nursing Exchange: Changing Lives



Photo credit Melodie Hicks

In all my life, no experience has transformed me, both professionally and personally, like my first trip to Malawi did. When I volunteered to sit on a steering committee over 10 years ago, little did I know that I would end up where I am today. It was in January 2008 when a small group of Vanier students and teachers from a variety of disciplines travelled to Malawi to study HIV/AIDS as a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)-funded, public engagement project. Shortly after our arrival in the small rural village of Makupo, it became clear to me that there were overwhelming needs for health information and access to quality health care as well as an abundance of incredible learning opportunities for students. I was both humbled and horrified on that first trip. The reality of such abject poverty enraged me, and it motivated me to get a sustained exchange program going at Vanier.

Over the years since its establishment in 2010, more than 60 students have participated in the Malawi Nursing Exchange. The opportunity to share my passion for global health, sustainable development and ethical engagement abroad continues to drive me each year. Vanier students have carried over \$200,000 worth of life-saving medications, employed an entire village for 8 years, and provided thousands of hours of free health care. I am very proud of the young people who have studied abroad with me; they continue to inspire me, and I feel so privileged to be able to offer this learning opportunity to our students. When I look back over my teaching career, it is the exchange program that I am most proud of because it fosters tolerance and understanding and helps our graduating students to develop their intercultural competence, something that all nurses need to possess if they are to provide meaningful care to patients.

The Malawi Nursing Exchange Alumni continue to be involved, supporting our fundraising efforts and attending our annual reunion at Mont Tremblant. They mentor the new participants and look out for one another in our Montreal area hospitals. For this article, I reached out to former students and asked a single, simple question: ***How has your participation in the Malawi Nursing Exchange Program impacted your life?*** Here are some of their responses.

***[The exchange] enabled me to grow, to learn, and to be part of a team that no textbook or lecture could ever replace.***

*“I participated in the Malawi nursing exchange 5 years ago. The insight that I acquired during those six weeks, in no exaggeration, remains with me as equally in my daily nursing practice as it does in my daily encounters. The experience not only taught me how to recognize cultural differences and adapt to them, but how to APPRECIATE them. It enabled me to grow, to learn, and to be part of a team that no textbook or lecture could ever replace. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have learned so many valuable lessons that have enriched my ability to care for others. At the end of the day, there are truly no words strong enough to describe how 6 weeks altered not only my perception of the world, but how I choose to contribute to it.”*

—Chrissy Mitchell (MNE 2013 and Alumni Trip 2016). Chrissy obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Nursing from McGill University in 2015. She is currently pursuing a Master’s in Nursing at Ottawa University. She teaches part-time in the Vanier Nursing program and works in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at St. Mary’s Hospital.

*“Before going to Malawi, I had preconceived notions of what nursing in a “developing country” would be like. Being in Malawi has not only made me a more versatile and competent healthcare professional, but on a personal level, it has grown in me a deep appreciation for other cultures here in Montreal and made me more understanding of the stories they have to tell.”*

—Sarah Salzani (MNE 2018). Sarah is in her first year of the Bachelor of Nursing (Integrated) (BNI) program at McGill University.

*“Originally from Brooklyn New York, an individual in my position could only dream of participating in a program that sends students thousands of miles away from home. Luckily, I was one of the few selected to partake in this adventure. From the moment I stepped off the plane, I knew this experience would positively influence my life. The breathtaking beauty of the country and its people welcomed each of us with open arms. Being the only person of African descent in my group, when alone in Malawi, I played the role of a chameleon, blending in with the people around me despite my “pro athlete frame.” It was a new feeling to be a part of the visible majority, however it was not an unnatural feeling. This exchange allowed me to experience firsthand how my life might have been different had my mother never decided to take a chance and move to the United States. I immediately developed much appreciation for my Malawian student peers who not only had to deal with demanding school tasks but also life. From having to do their laundry every weekend by hand to dealing with frequent power outages and poor internet connections and completing their school work... All of which we North Americans take for granted every day. Despite this, every student that I met at Kumuzu College was more than capable of dealing with these issues. Their lives seemed much less stressful than ours; they were always smiling and never complaining about any of the issues I just mentioned. Yes, this is a generalization and Malawi does have its fair share of demanding issues, but it is their resilience that I have come to admire and take back with me after my visit. It is that resilience that I have used to guide myself through life’s obstacles, and I undoubtedly believe it will continue to help me obtain my life goals.”*

—Duchelin Joseph (MNE 2012). Duchelin graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Saint Xavier University in 2018. He is currently working at the Montreal Neurological Institute and is teaching part-time in the Vanier Nursing Program.

*“The Malawi Nursing Exchange and three trips since: you can definitely say that the experience of nursing in Malawi has played a huge role in who I am today. I was able to discover my passion for global health and my dream to one day pursue it as a career. These trips have allowed me to grow not only as a nurse but as a person too. They have challenged me and shaped me in ways that no other opportunity has. The MNE has taught me to always keep an open mind and has changed my perspective on life. It has kept me humble and reminds me daily to be grateful. It has given me life-long friends and unforgettable memories. A piece of me will always belong to Malawi.”*

—Laura Heather (MNE 2015). Laura completed her Bachelor degree in Nursing at McGill University in 2017. She has travelled to Malawi several times since, with the 2016 Alumni trip, in 2017 with the McGill Ambassador Program, and in 2018, she accompanied the MNE2018 to offer mentorship. She is currently working in General Surgery at St Mary’s Hospital.

*“In addition to providing me with an excellent training opportunity, the Malawi Nursing Exchange program has had a profound impact on my life. My 7-week experience in Malawi in 2015 and my return in 2016 showed me how, even with few resources, our efforts can have a significant impact on the delivery of nursing care and health education. I learned so much through my hands-on experience both in Makupo village and in remote villages during our mobile clinics. The exposure to the cultural nuances of the people in Malawi, interacting with nursing staff, team members, and patients, was an enriching experience for me. I feel privileged to have been part of it and continue to feel a deep connection to the people of Malawi - who I now view as an extended family.”*

—Emélie Elkrief (MNE 2015 and Alumni trip 2016). Emelie has worked as a neonatal intensive care nurse at the Jewish General Hospital and is now at McGill pursuing her Bachelor’s degree in Nursing.

*“Being part of the Malawi Nursing Exchange Program has pushed me to expand my worldview. It has kick-started my curiosity towards understanding the realities of individuals of different backgrounds, whether it be cultural, social, or economical. My experience there has given me the motivation and drive to be a better nurse and person overall. I believe that the experience has instilled positivity and confidence in me, and it has taught me that I can make a real change, here and abroad. I am forever grateful to have been a part of this program; it has definitely played a part in shaping me into the individual I am today.”*

—Cristine Mae Ramolette (MNE 2016). Cristine graduated from McGill University in 2018 with her Bachelor’s in Nursing and is currently working at St Mary’s Hospital in the Intensive Care Unit.



Photo credit Melodie Hicks



## 12 – VANIER ACADEMIC VOICES

*“The Malawi Nursing Exchange Program has allowed me to broaden my horizons, to question my preconceived ideas, to open my eyes, and to learn. It solidified a foundation that as a young nursing professional I so deeply needed. Looking back, all my past achievements I owe in part to this experience. It allowed to understand my impact on others, it allowed me to question and listen, and finally it allowed me to make a difference.”*

—Demetra Horotan (MNE 2012). Demetra graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor in Nursing in 2014. She now works at the Jewish General Hospital in the Emergency Department and has taught part-time for John Abbott, McGill, and Vanier in their Nursing programs. Demetra is currently completing her Nurse Practitioner Primary Care Program at McGill University.

*“My participation in the exchange program had a great impact on my life. I had an opportunity to learn how nurses in Canada (Montreal and Quebec) provide care to patients and the patients’ perceptions and expectations towards the care they receive. This helped me gain knowledge, skills and an attitude towards the improvement of my nursing practice in Malawi. I also had an opportunity to learn about other cultures. This helped me to have confidence in the application of the transcultural theory of nursing, something I had learned about in Malawi but had not had the chance to apply or really understand in our settings.”*

—Cynthia Mwachande (MNE 2017). Cynthia graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor in Nursing and Midwifery, Kamuzu College of Nursing, Malawi. She is currently working as the Head Nurse at the Chilanga Community Clinic, Malawi.

*“The Malawi-Canada Nursing Exchange was a very helpful experience for me. I have learned that we need to work hard to succeed in life. For example, you Canadians are hard workers and punctual. I saw many people working in two places (companies) to make enough to sustain their living. People in Montreal never seem to tire easily and no one was just staying idle. On education, on the nursing side, I feel the approach used was good. The students were doing theory along with practicals, which was so easy to learn from since everything learned in class was fresh and easy to remember and put into practice. This is different from the approach used in nursing schools in Malawi, which start with theory then move on to practicals.*

*By the time students get to practice, they have forgotten the content. This requires that they have to do a lot of studying on their own. On lifestyle, Canadians eat healthy food (low fat, salt and sugar) and do fitness exercises like ice skating, etc. Canadians are also accountable and responsible citizens in keeping the environment tidy and clean by throwing their litter in refuse bins in public areas. My memories are still fresh, I miss Canada!”*

—Eliza Mlolowa (MNE 2016). A mother of two, Eliza graduated from Kamuzu College of Nursing in 2017 with a Bachelor’s in Nursing and Midwifery. Eliza is currently awaiting placement in a government hospital.

***My experience gave me a social responsibility to contest health inequalities and showed me opportunities to act against the injustices of our system.***



Photo credit: Melodie Hicks





Photo credit Melodie Hicks

*“The Malawi Nursing Exchange program helped me to understand nursing in a broader context. In addition, it helped me to understand the effects of different cultures on health. It was the experience of a lifetime.”*

—Hellen Meke (MNE 2017 – 2018). Graduated from Kamuzu College of Nursing, Malawi with a Bachelor’s degree in Nursing and Midwifery.

*“The Malawi Nursing Exchange Program was always something I wanted to be a part of. In my first year of nursing, I got excited hearing about the new developments in the village and hearing the experiences of the students when they got back and presented at the annual nursing conference. When it was my chance to go, I knew I had to make the most of it. I tried to soak up everything that Malawi had to offer. The people, the culture, and the friendships I made were unforgettable.”*

*This was a major milestone in my life and really taught me a lot about myself. It gave me the tools and strength to be a great nurse. I felt changed once I got back, in the best way possible. I felt more knowledgeable, stronger as a person, and more confident as a nurse. The experiences and hardships I went through stayed with me. Whenever I don’t feel confident enough or strong enough, I look back at what I was able to accomplish in Malawi and it gives me strength to continue. It has made me into the person and nurse that I am today, and I am forever grateful.”*

—Michelle Samaha (MNE 2016). Michelle is currently pursuing her Bachelor’s at McGill while working in orthopedic trauma at the Montreal General Hospital. She is hoping to continue to do her Master’s and Nurse Practitioner program!

*“I am one of the Malawi nursing students who was privileged to be part of exchange with Vanier College. This program gave me an opportunity to experience nursing in another setting; I was able to relate theory to practice. Some of the theory is not put in practice in our country as we are resource-limited. Above all, the programme changed my attitude towards nursing, it has been a success to my professional development. A lot of thanks to the coordinator, Melodie Hicks.”*

—Maggie Phiri (MNE 2017). Maggie graduated from Kamuzu College of Nursing in 2018 with a Bachelor’s in Nursing and Midwifery.

*“It’s been over 5 years since I had the chance to participate in the Malawi Nursing Exchange Program. This experience remains one of the most meaningful of my life. This internship was not only an enriching adventure, but it gave me a glimpse of understanding about complex global health issues, which still motivates me today. Since I had this opportunity, I continued to follow the path of public health through my higher education and career interests.”*

*Coming back from the internship, I started to question many things that I took for granted. I had many unanswered inquiries about the roots of gender inequality and health disparities between countries. I decided to pursue my graduate studies in public health, in the global health field, to have a better understanding of the health issues that I witnessed during my internship in Malawi.*

*The experience helped raise my awareness about different issues that I wasn’t aware of before going to Malawi. I experienced a culture shock when I arrived in Malawi, and this has enabled me to be empathetic with newcomers to Canada, understanding some of the challenges they are going through. Since then, I have had an interest in supporting and volunteering for local initiatives that promote migrant’s rights in Montreal.*

*Finally, through the unique journey that I’ve been part of, sometimes difficult and disturbing and at other times filled with humanity, my regard on social health inequalities has changed. My experience gave me a social responsibility to contest health inequalities and showed me opportunities to act against the injustices of our system.”*

—Janie Plourde (MNE 2013). Janie graduated from Université de Montréal in 2016 with a Bachelor’s in Nursing. She pursued her Master’s degree in Public Health at École de santé publique de l’Université de Montréal and completed her final research project on rural population vaccination in India. Janie continues to volunteer for Medecin du Monde in Montreal, and she works part-time in the emergency department at the Jewish General Hospital.



Melodie Hicks  
is a Nursing teacher.

## A Collective Classroom Journey with Talking Circles: Addressing the TRC’s Calls to Action for Educators

*“I can’t believe that I’m doing this type of exercise in biology class!”*

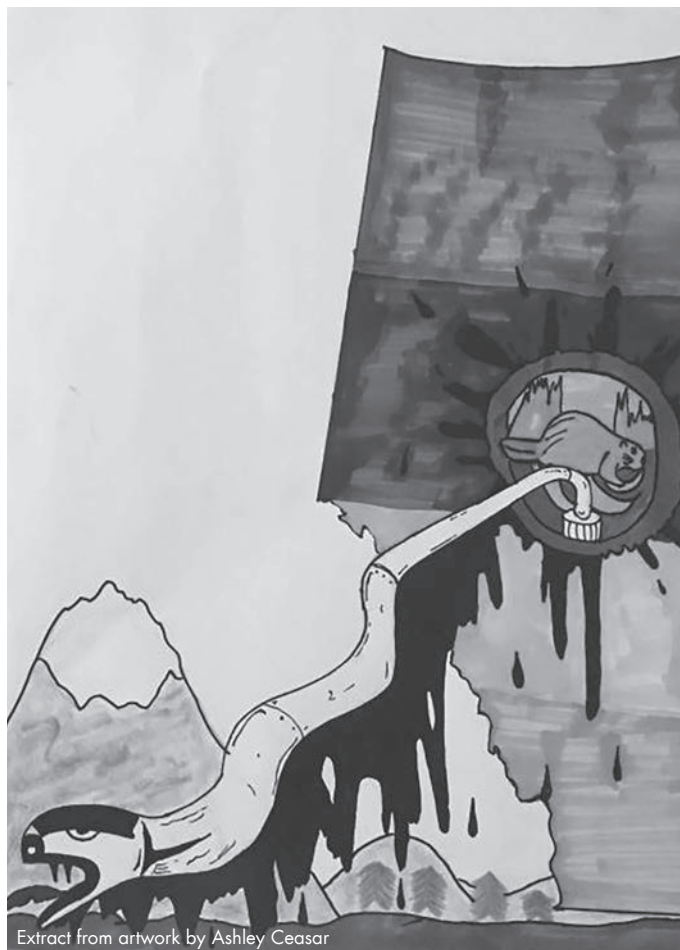
Last January, I used talking circles to introduce my students to the term project for our General Biology 1 class. I was inspired to use this method by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action for educators and educational institutions. *Call 62: Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.* I was privileged to be included in Vanier’s Indigenous Education training during the Winter 2018 semester, thanks to Jacky Vallée’s hard work. This training and investment are worthwhile and should continue; what I gained, and what I think others will gain, is a necessary understanding of indigenous history in Canada and a unique perspective on learning. Personally, my sense of gratitude is overwhelming. The Indigenous Education program challenged me, and yet it gave me a newfound sense of peace. As a participant in the program alongside my Vanier colleagues and as a participant in talking circles, engaging in a democratic dynamic with my students, my approach to teaching has been transformed. Now it’s up to me to integrate what I’ve learned into the classroom.

My initial goal last semester was to integrate some of the topics and techniques to fulfill my responsibility as a student of the Indigenous Education program. Another very important goal was that my students could benefit from perspectives gained through the Indigenous methods I had learned. It was challenging, though; the majority of my students – around 80% – had no knowledge of residential schools or the Sixties Scoop. I am proud of the students I teach; I want them to be knowledgeable and equipped with the tools to act in the best interest of their communities, but I don’t want them to participate in the social biases that currently exist against Indigenous people. I want them, as young and developing scientists, to gain a new perspective and to value their work by accounting for its impact on the land and the people who have traditionally lived here, instead of limiting their scope to the pursuit of statistical significance.

The term project assignment was to explore a Canadian ecological issue from the perspective of the indigenous peoples who are directly impacted. I wanted to use an indigenous way of learning to introduce the idea of indigenous perspective and to continue to revisit their developing reflections on topics of indigenous perspective throughout the semester. In a talking circle, the teacher is not the leader or manager of a conversation. My only role in this work was to introduce the talking point. The talking point is my term for a prompt that initiates the discussion. In one instance, I read students an origin story (*Skywoman and Turtle Island*); in another I read them the story of *Ki’et’sa’kun*, written by Antonio Graydon (Snuneymuxw in BC).

The other talking points concerned the social and ecological effects of North America’s colonization, threats to species from expanding cities, and urban ecology including co-existence with coyotes.

The talking point is introduced, and it occupies the center of our focus, the collective psychic centre of our circle. In the circle, each participant is given equal opportunity to share their reflections on the talking point. This is the most democratic process I have ever experienced in my life! It’s a vulnerable process to go through, but equally vulnerable for all participants, including for me as their teacher. My role in this exercise is different from my regular classroom practice. I do not direct the progress of the discussion to get it “back on track”; each participant has an equal role in shaping the direction of the discussion. The agenda for everyone is simply to gain new perspectives and a fuller understanding of the talking point from the diverse viewpoints of the talking circle participants.



Extract from artwork by Ashley Ceasar



Extract from artwork by Erin Williams

According to their feedback, students enjoyed the rules of process for the talking circle. When speaking, each participant holds a designated object; when they are finished sharing their perspective on the talking point, they pass the object to the person beside them. Reflections of participants can springboard from what another speaker contributed, but they cannot be directed to a single person. The focus of contributions must always be the talking point. In fact, during the most recent talking circle, this Fall 2018 semester, I introduced the unit test they had just written as the talking point. This is the only time that I didn't participate in the circle as a speaker. The collective sharing of sighs and laughter was a strong indication that the talking circle method is a powerful method for listening that fosters empathy.

The talking circle approach provides opportunities for authentic listening. This is challenging for teachers to achieve, as we're usually the ones doing a lot of the talking and directing in our classes. However, it's also tough to witness misunderstanding, and it's even more difficult to hear as biased perspectives against Indigenous people are revealed.

The practice of talking circles is also a mind-bend for the participating students. It's tough for the students to see the teacher as an equal in the circle. Often students seek approval from me for their contribution, or they directly ask me questions rather than claim the opportunity

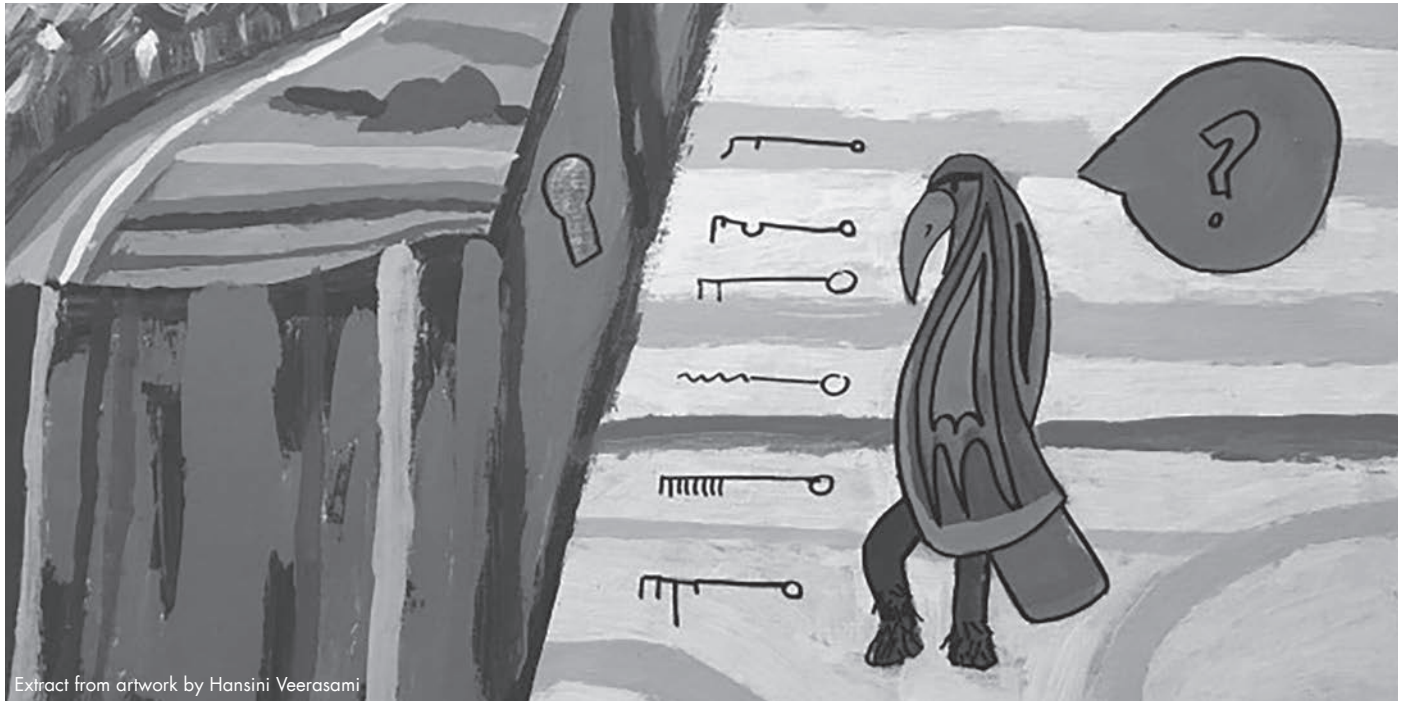
to share their perspective. Other, more unexpected struggles are revealed. For example, some wonderfully honest responses from students during the first class's talking circle included "I've heard all this stuff on residential schools and the Sixties Scoop now, and now I don't know what to believe!" and "Well, isn't this just survival of the fittest?" These were very difficult responses to hear, and they made me question if I should continue doing talking circles with these students. But we continued. During the training my colleagues and I received in Kahnawá:ke, the leaders often repeated, "It takes the time it takes." The projects submitted by my students at the end of the Winter 2018 semester demonstrated that they had thought through something that was new to them. They weren't simply delivering the "correct" scientific answer or solution; they were open. For example, one student who had been resistant at first ended up producing a very thought-provoking essay on the exclusion of Inuit consultation in drafting Canada's climate strategy. I believe that as young scientists, they were also learning to re-

claim something that has been lost in mainstream science culture. To approach nature as something that is a part of a student's experience in a more holistic way builds empathy and deeper understanding rather than something to study from an emotionally disengaged distance.

***Diverse participation in science is extremely important for ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented.***

Science isn't all about measuring; it's more about the application of methods for finding paths to truth. The reasoning (or logic) behind this set of operational rules is to test a belief (that is, an explanation of a phenomenon), and to reject it if it doesn't produce the results we expect. If, however, we can support the belief from testing it once, we can retest it in many new and different ways to determine the limits of this truth and look for the conditions for when it fails. This is the way to truth that we as scientists pretty much all agree on. It's a robust method that gets results. It's been the method that's helped us build knowledge in a collaborative international community. The respect and power held by the scientific community makes it very attractive to our young people. There is security in a future in science.





Extract from artwork by Hansini Veerasami

I wanted to push my students to consider a new perspective in their term projects, a perspective that intentionally avoided projects with “scientific” solutions based on “scientific” measures, something we are all overly familiar with. Most of my students submitted projects that were artistic expressions of the “measures” of ecological effects on the Indigenous people of their chosen area. They included studies of the medicine and stories of the people, the role of important animals in their culture, and they recounted heartbreaking tragedies such as the fallout from the hydroelectric developments of the James Bay Project and the stories of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls of BC’s Highway 16, the Highway of Tears. Project submissions included videos, songs, paintings, embroidery, scrapbooks and stories.

Increasingly, academic and research institutions are investing in the promotion of inclusiveness and diversity among the practitioners of science. I believe that this approach is integral to increasing the quality of science, since a rich diversity of people brings a rich diversity of perspectives and a diversity of ways to consider and test phenomena. As a teacher, I am training new scientists, and I feel that I’m serving them and society better if I challenge them to consider the perspective of those who knew the land intimately before European colonization. This may also challenge them to question the culture of some science fields, which, for the sake of quantifiable measures, exclude valuable people and perspectives that are tied to their research. Diverse participation in science is extremely important for ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented. Science can be done in a better way to serve our communities better.

I still can’t put my finger on *exactly* why I’m enjoying my teaching practice more than ever before. I think a powerful reason is that the Indigenous Education at Vanier has taught me how to listen. My gratitude grows.



Stephanie Felkai  
is a Biology teacher.

#### Student work:

Song by Mark Kandaleft: <https://biologyyawinter2018.wordpress.com/author/markandaleft/>

Painting by Ashley Caesar: <https://biologyyawinter2018.wordpress.com/author/ashleycaesar/>

Embroidery by Erin Williams:  
<https://biologyyawinter2018.wordpress.com/2018/05/31/the-culling-of-wolves-in-the-yukon/>

Artwork by Léa Nadeau: <https://biologyyawinter2018.wordpress.com/2018/05/25/crow-river/>

Artwork by Gabriella Ricci: <https://biologyyawinter2018.wordpress.com/2018/05/30/mikisew-cree-first-nation/>

Artwork by Hansini Veerasami: <https://biologyyawinter2018.wordpress.com/2018/05/25/135/>

Project by Rodrigo Galiana-Audet: <https://youtu.be/MAMszGMxqIo>

# My Academic Journey



Photo credit Marlene Crossman

About eight years ago, I started on a journey here at Vanier as I became the Coordinator of the Vanier College Symposium on the Holocaust and Genocide. Given the fact that I was fairly new to the college, I wasn't sure about taking this on. As it turns out, saying yes to the symposium has allowed me to grow as a colleague, teacher, and (as corny as that sounds) as a human being.

***These experiential opportunities have helped students develop nuanced perspectives contextualized by the complexity of antisemitism experienced both during the Holocaust and in our current, contemporary context.***

A couple of years ago, it was the symposium's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and I knew we had to do something that represented the fact that Vanier College was the only Cegep in Quebec devoting one week to the idea of Holocaust and genocide education. I had approached the Honorable Professor Irwin Cotler (Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, an Emeritus Professor of Law at McGill University, former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and longtime Member of Parliament, and an international human rights lawyer) to be our Honorary Chairman. I then con-

tacted Dr. Charles Asher Small (a Vanier graduate) and asked him to be our Keynote speaker. Dr. Small is the Founding Director of the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP), which he began at Yale University and later, Stanford University. ISGAP's mission is to explore antisemitism within a comprehensive, interdisciplinary framework from an array of approaches and

perspectives as well as global, national and regional contexts and therefore, Dr. Small's work fit very well within the mandate of the symposium. Dr. Small's credentials after leaving Vanier are impressive as he went on to graduate with a BA in Political Science from McGill University, an M.Sc. in Urban Development Planning in Economics, Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London, and a Doctorate of

Philosophy (D.Phil), St. Antony's College, Oxford University. Dr. Small accepted my invitation. The following year, he became the Honorary Chairman for the symposium. This began my journey of learning about contemporary antisemitism.

Last summer, I applied for the ISGAP-Oxford Summer Institute for Curriculum Development in Critical Studies in Contemporary Antisemitism. I was surprised and honoured to be accepted as a scholar-in-residence alongside 34 other professors from all



over the world. The participants in this two-week conference were impressive, and I was seated with highly accomplished scholars. The calibre of speakers that we heard was remarkable; we received the most up-to-date information on topics such as the Middle East and Israel, Nigeria and Boko Haram, the new Polish “Holocaust Law” and resistance to it, Russia and Ukraine, and so on. We attended classes from 9 in the morning, and sometimes we were there until 10 at night. The experience was quite intense, but the result was that all 35 of us formed a tight-knit group that got along so well! As a matter of fact, I get emails every day from at least one of the other participants. We are very active on our Facebook page, posting articles and stories that we think others might enjoy. Before getting a diploma from the summer institute, every professor had to present a course outline dealing with contemporary antisemitism from their specific domains. I presented a course outline for the course, *Integrative Project (IP)*, using the topic of antisemitism. I will be teaching this course in the Fall of 2019.

The scourge of global antisemitism is a significant threat to basic democratic values and human decency. According to a report from B’nai Brith Canada (Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, 2016), there were 1,728-recorded antisemitic acts last year in Canada, up from 1,277 in 2015. This is the highest number the group has seen since it began monitoring antisemitism in Canada in 1982. Research

suggests that all forms of hatred are on the rise in both Canada and the U.S. According to the Anti-Defamation League (2015), 3,800,000 people in Canada harbour antisemitic attitudes. According to Statistics Canada (2017), there were more hate crimes in the province of Quebec in 2015 than in 2014. Additionally, Jewish students across the U.S. and Canada are feeling increasingly unsafe due to a marked rise in the level of antisemitism on college campuses (Pollack, 2011).

The Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Study (2018) found that 22% of U.S. millennials haven’t heard of or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust. Two-thirds of American millennials couldn’t identify what Auschwitz is. Yet 93% of these same millennials feel that more about the Holocaust should be taught. These statistics are shocking but maybe not surprising. As fewer people are learning about the Holocaust, the rate of Holocaust denial is increasing; due to the reach of communication platforms on the internet, the proliferation of such ideas is expanding (Darnell, 2010). In learning all of this, it has become increasingly important to me that I continue to draw attention to both the Holocaust and to antisemitism, more broadly.

Several years ago, I created an educational trip with Kelly Purdy called the *Moral Responsibility and Global Citizenship Trip*. In our



Photo credit Marlene Grossman



first year, we went to Austria and Italy. While in Europe, students got to see remnants of the Holocaust (like Mauthausen Concentration Camp), but also, we had many visits to contextualize the information. Our visits included a reception with the Canadian Ambassador to Austria at the Ambassador's residence; a tour of Magda's Hotel (run by refugees in Austria); a meeting with Niklas Frank, son of former Nazi, Hans Frank, who was sentenced to death by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg; and a visit to the Vatican with Father Norbert Hoffmann (Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews Vatican City). The following year, we took students to Greece. A goal of this trip was to educate the students about Greece's history during the Second World War. Most students do not know this history, which is especially relevant given that 94% of Greek Jews died during the Holocaust. Greece is still considered to be one of the most antisemitic countries in the world according to the latest research conducted by the Anti-Defamation League in 2014.

These experiential opportunities have helped students develop nuanced perspectives contextualized by the complexity of antisemitism experienced both during the Holocaust and in our current, contemporary context. The educational objectives for the trip were as follows:

- 1) Become more aware of the civic and moral responsibilities we all have as members of the global community. This includes having students cultivate virtues (ethics, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for one another);
- 2) Develop stronger cognitive skills, including critical thinking and the ability to think analytically;
- 3) Develop a global perspective (intellectual and cultural experience through active engagement with historical events and how they continue to impact our modern world);
- 4) Prepare for lifelong learning.

When we started out on the trip, the students are often insecure and their knowledge quite limited, but by the end of our journey together, they were more confident in travelling and in each other, and their knowledge about the topics increased dramatically. They truly come out of their little Vanier bubble, and it was wonderful to see!

Since the summer at Oxford in 2018, I've experienced a renewed sense of purpose as an educator. As I watch antisemitism continuing to rally support, I feel that drawing attention to this cause is vitally important. We see evidence of this when we see a gunman going into a synagogue in Pittsburgh during the Sabbath, killing 11 Jewish people, and we see it again when we look at the relentless attacks on Jewish people in Europe (in France, England, and Belgium, to name a few). We even see antisemitism expressing itself at home: Robert Gosselin was recently arrested in Montreal after he posted on Le Devoir's website in October that he wanted to go into a Jewish school and kill as many Jewish children as possible.

So how do I, as a Vanier teacher, shine a spotlight on this oldest form of hatred? Firstly, the curriculum for the IP course on antisemitism that I sketched out at Oxford will be taught in the fall of 2019. It will incorporate much of the knowledge I gleaned from the Oxford University conference. Secondly, Kelly and I have written a proposal to turn our *Moral Responsibility Trip* into a universal complementary course. Thirdly, Grace Valiante and I have written a SSHRC research proposal called "Online Antisemitism: Use of Explicit and Implicit Language and its Implications on Pedagogy." This is being undertaken with partners such as the University of Postdam, the University of Haifa, the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, Hillel Montreal, The Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, and LEARN Quebec. We are working with a German linguist who has been able to isolate online antisemitism down to its language and then conduct qualitative and quantitative analysis on it. We will then develop strategies to counter online antisemitism; always, we will develop approaches to integrating this knowledge into our course design and teaching practices. A great deal of work has already been done, but this is an ongoing conversation, a conversation of the greatest importance. How do we, as educators, engage our students in ways that will help them become morally responsible citizens of the world?



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is a Psychology teacher.

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# Quiet Counsel: The Academic Advising Department at Vanier College

If you have ever heard a talk by our DG, John McMahon, you will have heard the phrase “what’s right about Vanier.” I may have found an example of just that in my new department.

As a Clinical Psychotherapist transitioning into the Academic Advising Department, I was astonished to realize the scope and depth of our offerings to students. For a 7-person team, the sheer scale and variety of the student-centred workload is truly remarkable. A survey we conducted validated my inclination about the extent of our contact with and relevance to the student body. I would like to share with you who we are, what we do, and why we matter and then discuss opportunities for further development.

## Who we are and how we function

*Professionals:* The Academic Advising Department has a flat hierarchical structure wherein teamwork and mentorship is highly regarded. The department is lucky to boast 5 Academic Advisors, each with an accumulated average of close to 20 years of work experience at Vanier College, as well as a highly skilled secretary, and myself. In addition to individual work, regular and ongoing collaboration between advisors helps to manage tasks, share information, support each other, and keep the team relevant.

*Front Desk:* Our well-trained and highly respected secretary is able to deliver immediate answers to common student concerns; she provides “triage,” schedules appointments, and takes care of all administrative aspects from the front desk. During busy times or when she needs to step away, there is an “all hands-on deck” approach, with all advisors competent to tend the front desk. In particular, the coordinator of the department consistently replaces the secretary whenever needed.

*Scrum:* The Academic Advising team has regular, brief department meetings called Scrum. These meetings are between 5 and 15 minutes, with members standing to encourage succinct and on-point participation. Scrums were borne as a response to the loss of the conference room and, although this limits important meeting activities, the department has resourcefully managed an adequate solution. This demonstrates a certain resilience and flexibility. However, as Scrums are held in the narrow department hallway or crammed into the office of the coordinator, it does not permit for meeting requirements with external stakeholders.

*Technology:* Academic Advising uses technology and social media effectively to promote services and disseminate information. In addition, advisors work with helpline staff during registration to ensure that students are well informed and registered in the right programs

and courses from the start. This has been a successful, proactive strategy in curbing the need for later individual appointments to correct mistakes.

## Our remit

The box below outlines some of the core competencies of academic advisors; below this, it is further expanded upon, to illustrate the extent of the task in hand:

### *Academic Advisor Core Competencies*

#### *Knowledge of:*

- *Institution specific history, mission, vision, values and culture*
- *Curriculum, degree programs, and other academic requirements and options*
- *Institutional specific policies, procedures, rules, and regulations*
- *The characteristics, needs, and experiences of major and emerging student populations*
- *Campus and community resources that support student success*
- *Information technology applicable to relevant advising roles*

#### *Interdepartmental work at Vanier*

- Communication and recommendations regarding course and program changes.
- Working with departments to facilitate intersessions and summer courses to help students graduate.
- Regular, tailored in-class presentations to help students progress smoothly through their programs.

#### *High School and University information*

- High school visits to present and promote Vanier College.
- Detailed knowledge of university programs (including admission requirements, deadlines and program changes).
- Robust links to Quebec universities and their representatives (including hosting university events at Vanier).

#### *Individual student contact*

- Immediate assistance by front desk to answer quick questions.
- Drop-in hours - accessible daily student counsel (including dropping, taking, inquiring, and changing classes and programs).
- Timely, tailored, individual appointments to help students manage their programs, workloads, and academic expectations. Advisors will see up to 10 students per day.

- A proportion of contacts with students result in follow-up appointments or other forms of communication.
- Regular large-scale review of all student charts (“Sample”) to ensure academic compliance and avoid obstacles to graduation.

*Did you know that the Academic Advising Department reviews **every** enrolled student’s progression chart **twice a semester** to ensure that students meet all requirements to move smoothly through their programs? Recommendations and changes are then communicated to individual students by the advisors.*

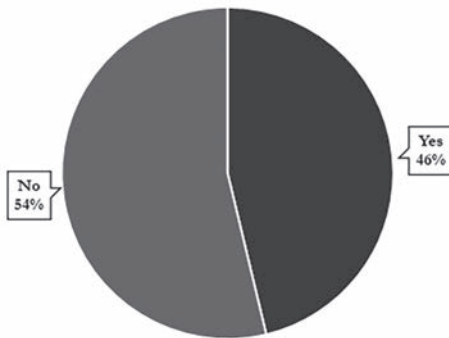
### Why it matters what we do

Academic Advising is a bit of a misnomer, in that it reaches far beyond scheduling and dropping classes. In fact, it touches on every aspect of a student’s experience- past, present and future. To validate that assertion, we conducted a survey.

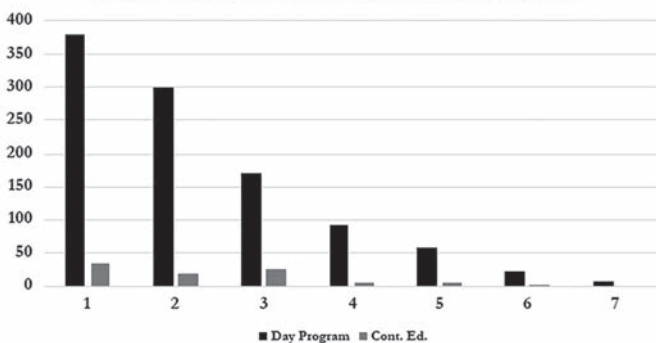
*Survey:* We conducted a short quantitative survey to assess students’ use of Academic Advising

services. The survey was sent to all 7404 enrolled Day Program and Continuing Education Program students. It was conducted between September 26<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. We received an impressive response of 2471 (33.4%). We found that almost half of respondents had used our services in person, and, more often than not on multiple occasions. In addition to this, electronic and phone communications are common. Further breakdown of the data can be found in the charts below.

Have you ever seen an Academic Advisor?



Number of Individual, In-Person Student Contacts



Academic Advisors help to ameliorate many student struggles, such as career concerns, parental expectations, and general future angst, aiming to facilitate an attainable academic path. Advisors are closely monitoring, guiding, advising, supporting, comforting, and helping students to academically succeed. They help students set realistic goals, adjust unrealistic expectations, and ultimately find their own path for their future. The department is not simply fulfilling the mechanical aspect of their work – their commitment to student success demands a holistic approach that they embrace wholeheartedly.

### Observations

This article has demonstrated that the Academic Advising Department is a brilliant example of “what’s right about Vanier.”

The Academic Advisors are building rapport and creating an inclusive and respectful atmosphere wherein students are encouraged to problem solve, develop decision-making strategies, and learn to plan and set their own academic goals. In addition, Academic Advisors are advancing the Vanier community through interdepartmental and intercollegiate collaboration.

Academic Advising is unconditionally committed to student success and with a staff of 7 is able to track the academic needs of the entire student body. Furthermore, Academic Advisors see almost half of all enrolled students at least once, at their behest. The department is able to perform at this level, at least in part, due to its experience, its flat hierarchical structure, and its emphasis on collaboration, respect and flexibility.

In envisioning an even better and more efficient service at Vanier, consideration of the creation of a service center may be interesting. There is a natural symbiosis with other services such as Career Counselling, Student Success, and Early Alert Services. Creation of an Academic Service Centre, housing all of these elements in close proximity would undoubtedly improve services for students, facilities for staff, enhance collaboration and quality assurance, avoid duplication, and best use professional expertise.



A special thank you to Rita Tomasetta for helping with the data collection. Survey data available upon request.



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is an Academic Advisor.

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# Using Feedback to Build Bridges to Learning

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*My undergraduate poetry professor, Professor Johnson, was a tall, thin woman, whose turtleneck was always the same colour as her trousers. Her hair was always piled up in a large, tight bun high on her head. She had a habit of clutching her pearls as she lectured. I thought of her as the praying mantis.*

*For our first major essay, we were to choose one of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century poems discussed in class, and present our interpretation. I chose Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"—the one that begins "Had we but world enough and time." I wrote that the speaker was clearly trying to bed the coy mistress, and furthermore, to father her children.*

*When Professor Johnson handed back our papers, I was devastated. C-*

*I couldn't believe it. I had worked really hard on this paper. I was sure of my interpretation—it made perfect sense. It was supported by the poem. How could I be wrong?*

*I approached Professor Johnson after class.*

*"Professor, I don't understand why my grade is so low."*

*"Maggie, your paper is well written, but I do not agree with your analysis."*

*For the next essay, my 'interpretation' of the text was essentially the one Professor Johnson had presented in her lecture. I didn't put anywhere near the same effort into this essay. I wrote what she spoke.*

*I got an A.*

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## Introduction: Why Doesn't My Feedback Work?

They are familiar refrains: students say they don't get any feedback. Teachers say they spend hours writing comments, only to watch students toss their papers in the trash as they leave the classroom. Students say they don't understand the teacher's comments. Teachers say students don't apply their feedback.

What these complaints suggest is that the biggest problem with teacher-student feedback may be one of miscommunication – or missed communication. Students don't recognize feedback when it is offered, know what to do with it when they do, or know how to ask for it if it's not provided. Meanwhile, teachers, perhaps especially in higher education, don't appreciate that their students need guidance on how to ask for, interpret, and apply feedback. We teachers tend to forget our own experiences and habits as students, while assuming that our student experience was universal and representative (Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). In other words, we are our own implicit models (Grossman 1991): we expect our own students to think, write, study, and behave as we did ourselves.

This last point is, of course, very pertinent in Cégep education; chances are, most of us who have chosen to teach at the college level did so because school came pretty naturally for us. The things that fascinated us – philosophy, history, literature, science – naturally led us into teaching. And we're comfortable (perhaps *only* comfortable) in an academic environment. Is it fair, then, to assume that our students are comparably comfortable? That they know how to manage their workload, how to interpret our instructions, how to apply our feedback? One fundamental stage in our development as college teachers must be to recognize that our students, as well as their attitudes toward and approaches to our subject, are not mirror images of our own.

Thinking about this revelation in the context of assessment, consider that for feedback to be effective as a learning tool, both instructor and student need to understand what to do with it, why to do it, and how to do it consistently. Boud (2017) argues that feedback with no effect is not, in fact, feedback. Without interaction, models, and

explanations of feedback, students don't understand the fundamental concepts of instructor comments (Chanock, 2000). But many instructors don't provide such interaction because they feel that students "should know" how to interpret the comment (Chanock, 2000, p. 102). In other words, because most of us teachers knew what to do with feedback when we were students, we assume that we don't need to guide our students, to teach them how to read and respond to our feedback.

Several researchers have investigated problems regarding student reception to teacher feedback (Dohrer, 1991; Gibbs & Simpson, 2003; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Wiliam, 2011). Studies frequently indicate that feedback without interaction and guidance is ineffective, for the most part because students often do not understand instructor feedback (Bardine, Bardine & Deegan 2000; Chanock, 2000; Covic & Jones, 2008; Price & O'Donovan, 2006; Walker, 2008). This lack of clarity leads students to see feedback from their teachers with trepidation: at best, it is superficial and potentially confusing; at worst, it is corrective and demotivating.

***We need to reflect on what function our feedback fulfills, whether we make our meaning clear, and how we might use assessment and feedback more effectively, to foster learning and even motivate our students.***

Essentially, then, the problem lies in the gap between student needs and instructor expectations. Through my educational research, I explore how to bridge this gap, to find openings in our feedback interactions within which to create a dialogue, and perhaps to shift how students think about, receive, and interpret feedback. Within this feedback dialogue, I hope that students become comfortable in making their learning needs explicit, and I, as the teacher, learn to deconstruct my expectations and guide students in implementing feedback.

To this day, poetry remains my least favourite genre of literature to read and to teach. Perhaps it's unfair to lay that disdain entirely at Professor Johnson's door, but her comment on my paper certainly turned me off of her course, if not the whole genre. All of these years later, why does that one moment stick with me? How can I learn from (or how have I already learned from) it as a teacher?

If, as proposed, feedback is information about the gap between student performance and expectations, then Professor Johnson's explanation was *not* feedback; what it communicated was more about her expectation than my performance. I was judged against her interpretation of a piece of literature rather than a knowable standard of literary analysis. I felt like I wasn't asked to demonstrate that I could interpret and analyse poetry, but that I could predict what Professor Johnson's reading was likely to be. Even my interpretation of what her evaluation meant was guesswork, really—her feedback suggested

that my low mark was a result of not presenting a reading of the poem that corresponded to her own. It may be that my argument also wasn't well constructed, or that I was missing some crucial piece of information that belied my interpretation, or perhaps my analysis was too narrowly focused on the ending of the poem and failed to account for ideas presented in the opening lines. With no specific feedback, however, I had no choice but to guess what had gone wrong with my work, and naturally, I fell into the time-honoured student tradition of blaming the evaluator.

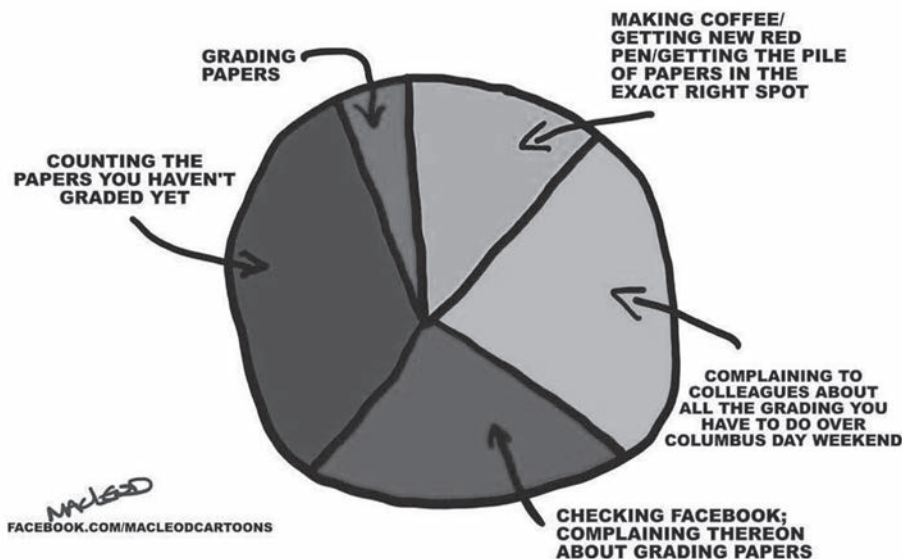
### **What Do You Mean, "What Do I Mean?"**

Think back to your own time as a student: in college, university, or even earlier. Do you remember a time when you got an assignment back and just couldn't figure out the teacher's comments? Or maybe there were no comments at all – just a grade that wasn't what you were expecting. Worse yet, did you ever receive a comment that made you feel like you hadn't tried hard enough or dug deep enough, or that you just weren't smart enough?

Perhaps you are one of the lucky few who had great teachers and were well suited to the world of traditional academia. But now you find yourself on the other side of the desk, striving to provide effective feedback to your own students, and you are at a loss. If they don't get it, isn't that on them? They should read more, read again, go find help, do more research, quit their part-time job, grow up, and take school more seriously. They should learn from your evaluations of their work. After all, what's more frustrating than spending the weekend grading student work, only to return that work and watch your students take one look at the mark and casually stuff their papers into their bags – or worse – the recycling bin?

Maybe, though, our frustration is matched by theirs. Maybe, as teachers, we need to reflect on what function our feedback fulfills, whether we make our meaning clear, and how we might use assessment and feedback more effectively, to foster learning and even motivate our students. Pedagogically, assessment is an integral and essential aspect of learning, "intrinsic to effective instruction" (Wiliam 2011). At its most basic, assessment is about *information*: teachers gather information about what their students are learning, students get information about their progress, institutions get information about success rates, and so on. The leap from mere information to effective feedback depends on what happens with the information generated. We assess students against standards – whether those standards are determined by some external body or our own idea of what constitutes excellent work – and our feedback is information about the gap between that standard and our students' actual performance (Ramaprasad, 1983). To be *effective*, that information offered through feedback has to be put to use. Unidirectional, closed statements of judgement—whether it's "good job" or "incomplete work"—will not provoke students to alter the gap.

## ANALYSIS OF FACULTY TIME USE WHILE "GRADING PAPERS"



## Formative, Summative, Blah Blah Blah

One question we might ask ourselves as teachers, then, is “what is the purpose of assessment?” or perhaps more accurately, “what are the purposes of assessment, and what do I want my students to get from this one instance of assessment?” If we are to engage in effective feedback, we need to embrace these reflections on the nature of assessment. *For how can we give feedback without a genuine, thorough understanding of what we expect students to do and why we’re asking them to do it?* Of course, sometimes our assessments are mandated and summative: a certification exam or cumulative project demonstrating that our students have mastered the required competencies. But these are final evaluations, and while feedback on these may be welcome, there is by definition no room for follow-up, at least within the relationship we have with that student. So teachers’ efforts toward developing effective feedback must be focused on instances of assessment that offer students opportunities to produce better work in the future. Class work, course assignments, and other formative assessments provide these opportunities.

A common misconception is that all formative assessment is ungraded, and all graded assessment is summative. In fact, any assessment, graded or otherwise, can be formative, in the sense that *formative* simply means that the assessment itself is a learning opportunity. Consider learning to drive: driving students do course work and homework; they drive with instructors and parents and other experienced drivers; perhaps they do practice theory tests online and book time on the driving school’s simulator. Along the way, they are getting constant feedback, from instructors and driving partners, from drivers in other cars, from the simulator screen, and so on – and from the car they’re driving, even. Without that multifaceted feedback, how much learning would happen? Some of the feedback,

naturally, is geared toward the summative tests. We know they will have to pass a theory test, the nature of which is well-known; and we know they will have to successfully navigate a road test. But we also want them to become drivers with whom we’re willing to share the road, so our feedback might also touch on driving etiquette, or safety considerations, or basic mechanics, regardless of whether or not these elements will be evaluated summatively.

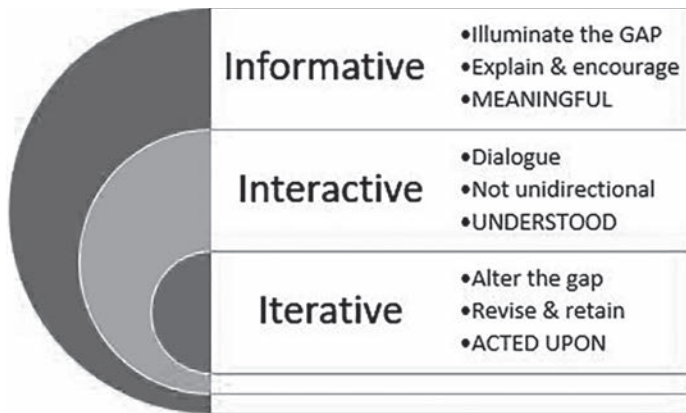
Wiliam (2011) suggested that formative assessment can also help teachers make decisions about future iterations of a course, a lesson, or an assignment; in other words, a teacher can use assessment for the benefit of future learners, based on present learners’ experiences. As implied above, effective feedback is not simply what comes after assessment; it is, particularly in formative assessment, “at the heart of effective learning” (Wiliam, p. 6). Wiliam, referring to the work of Allal and Lopez, said that the remediation model of assessment or *feedback + correction* has been particularly espoused in the Anglo-phone education model, whereas

within much of the research undertaken in Francophone countries, the central concept is ‘regulation,’ summarized as ‘feedback + adaptation. ... [here, regulation] used in the sense of adjustment in the way that a thermostat regulates the temperature of a room (p. 8).

In fact, simply correcting student work implies a closed process: student production, teacher correction, end of process. *Regulation*, on the other hand, implies student production, adjustment, reproduction, adjustment, and so on; in other words, assessment and feedback become cyclical and dialogic. Effective feedback is



meaningful, well understood, and acted upon; to indulge my love of alliteration, it is *informative*, *interactive*, and *iterative*. *Informative* feedback illuminates the gap between student performance and the standard. It explains how the performance measured up, and makes the grade associated with this evaluation meaningful. *Interactive* feedback is an exchange between teacher and student, or peer-to-peer, which provides further insight into the information. *Iterative* feedback allows for the information to be acted upon – perhaps in revision and reevaluation, or perhaps in student reflection and strategizing for future assessments.



Effective feedback is informative for both student and teacher. It relies on a mutual understanding of the standard and on our ability to explain to our students the nature of the gap between that standard and their performance. Why is this the standard? How is this standard relevant to their learning? How did their work compare to the standard? How big is the gap? Is this a gap that can be bridged easily, or do we need to take that bridge in steps? As teacher-assessors, we need to be explicit about our expectations and precise in our evaluation of our students' performance.

***Effective feedback is meaningful, well understood, and acted upon; to indulge my love of alliteration, it is informative, interactive, and iterative.***

So, offering feedback that is *informative* relates to the information we provide about the gap. *Interactive* relates to the communication and follow-up: for feedback to have an impact, we must enter into a dialogue with our students. This dialogue may be written or verbal, or some combination—we may write comments on student work, then invite questions or comments from them. How have they interpreted our comments? What do they think we're expecting in response? We can also invite feedback from students on their process, beyond the performance itself: how did they approach the assignment? Where did they struggle? What resources did they exploit? What resources did they want to use but couldn't find, or couldn't make fit?

According to Bérubé (2011), “one main goal of feedback is to signal the satisfaction or displeasure of the teacher” (slide 12). Best practice dictates that such affective feedback must be used temporarily and, more importantly, in conjunction with comments that “signal a gap between the product and the expectations” and with appropriate follow-up (slide 24). This follow-up is what makes our feedback iterative, for what is the purpose of information about a gap if we don't provide opportunities to bridge it? Our feedback must be acted upon, and we cannot take for granted that our students will know what actions to take, or why they should do it, without our guidance.

### Establishing Trust & Dialogue

How does all of this manifest in our practice? For me, these discussions provoke reflection on my approach to assessment and feedback. I may believe that the criteria, instructions, and written feedback I offer my students are very clear, but the recipients of these messages may not read them as I intended or apply them as I expect. Sadler (1998) identified factors that may delay or distort the effectiveness of feedback. The most influential factor, “temporal conditioning,” refers to the notion that students become accustomed to accepting ineffective or even “defective” feedback; they also come to expect great discrepancies in the nature, amount, and depth of feedback that different teachers provide. Through temporal conditioning, Sadler claimed, students learn “survival habits” (p. 77) that must be overcome to establish a more effective learning culture. Furthermore, Pollock (2012) pointed out that teachers themselves tend to think of feedback as unidirectional and “based on a behaviourist” model (p. 3); that is, feedback is provoked by student performance, but generated only by the teacher. But if we in higher education are concerned with “the development of independent, autonomous, lifelong learners” (Ellery 2008, p. 427), then “we need to provide time for assessment-related learning practices” (p. 428), including dialogic feedback. Lizzio and Wilson (2008) determined that developmental feedback that provides strategies to help students bridge the gap between their performance and the expected results was perceived as most effective. This student perception validates Lizzio and Wilson's contention that effective feedback “should contribute to knowledge of performance and the nature of the performance gap between actual and ideal performance” (p. 264).

So if I want to create learning opportunities through formative assessment, I need to create space for training my students to interpret and apply feedback. More importantly, I need to take time to demonstrate to students that I am listening to their feedback, and I must recognize feedback as an ongoing dialogue or “system of feedback loops” (Wiggins 2005, p. 185). One way that I have done this with my own students is *dialogue journaling*. On a regular basis, students write to me in a paper journal, and I write back to them. I do not comment on the mechanics of their writing; there is no

grammar or spelling scrutiny. Instead, I write to them in response to what they have written, and I try to match their openness. I provide prompts, such as “tell me about your semester so far,” or “what’s your favourite place in the world?” If a student writes to me about feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to choose a university major, for instance, I might write back about my own experience and how I got through it. I don’t judge what they write; I share at the same level of intimacy. Gillespie (2005) argues that “mutual knowing” (p. 213) is an essential aspect of student-teacher connection; by sharing aspects of my own life, past and present, I demonstrate trust in my students, and I allow them to know me as well as I come to know them (Gillespie 2002).

Often, in my journal responses, I deliberately choose red ink. I want to provoke a shift in how feedback is perceived: our feedback is a dialogue through which we build and learn, no matter what colour we use. If your feedback isn’t informative, interactive, and iterative, it doesn’t matter that you chose a “friendly” ink colour.

Dialogue journals are, in my experience, an excellent way to build trust and set the tone for future instances of feedback, but I am aware that we don’t all have the time and space for such a consuming task on a regular basis. I encourage you to try it at least occasionally, especially at the beginning of the semester—it’s also an excellent tool for learning students’ names and tacitly conveying that you’re aware of their presence and absence.

There are other ways to engage with students that might work better than or in concert with journaling: exit cards, for instance, invite students to write one sentence in response to the day’s principal concepts, giving us immediate feedback on group-wide gaps in understanding that we can address in the next class, or signalling students who might be struggling silently. Another effective method I have used is conferencing: students meet with me one-on-one to discuss an assignment, whether during or after its completion. A little less time-consuming is one habit I have consciously developed: giving them five or ten minutes in class to read my comments after work is returned. They can consult with a classmate, and they are

required to talk to me, even for a few seconds, to ask about a comment or respond to a question I’ve written on their work. Finally, based on research I have conducted, I know that not all teachers use the same shorthand in their comments, so I include a legend of my preferred expression indicators, and for electronic submissions, I have a set of preset comments with links to online resources for recurring errors (see figure 1).

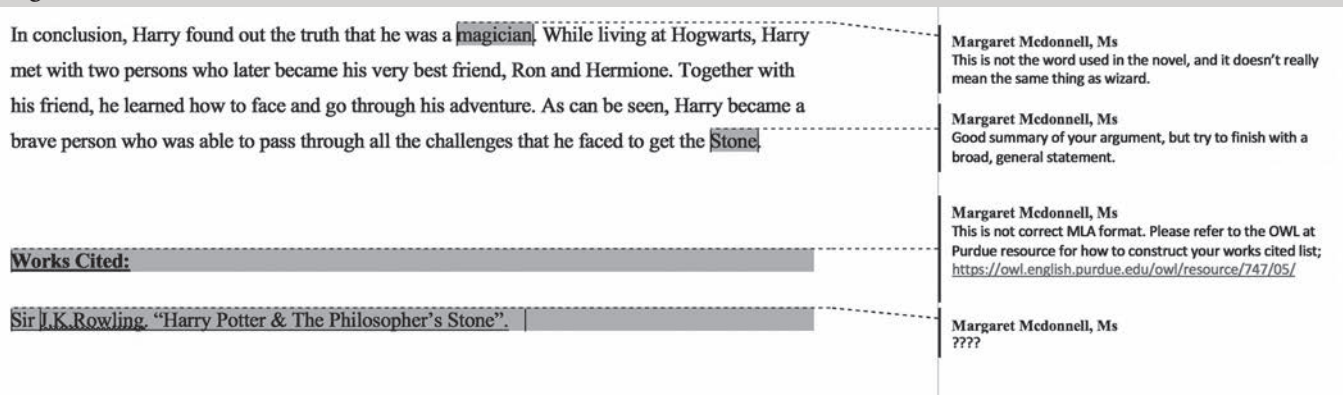
### Final Thoughts

We know—or at least, we hope—that our feedback affects our students. With effective feedback that is meaningful, interactive, and designed for follow-up, we can provoke positive change. We cannot assume that our students inherently understand what our feedback means, nor can we assume that they know what they’re supposed to do with that information. When it comes to assessment and learning, we need to be transparent about our expectations and clear about our intentions. Finally, we need to demonstrate our trust in our students, and we must be open to their feedback: if you want them to care about what you have to say, show them you care about what they have to say.



*Maggie McDonnell*  
is an English Teacher.

**Figure 1**



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## Vanier Researcher Profile

### Chris Gregg

Dr. Chris Gregg is a teacher, researcher and department coordinator in Vanier's Biology Department.

Chris found Biology fascinating from a young age, even though he did not have a comprehensive sense of what a career as a Biologist could look like at the time. As a Cegep student, he enrolled in the maximum number of Biology classes allowed by his pre-university program. His teachers rapidly recognized his potential and encouraged him to pursue university studies in the field.

During his first year of university, Chris read a class-assigned article about a technique called an alanine scan. "That paper helped me understand the relationship between DNA and an organism's physical characteristics. It also introduced me to the practical ways in which scientists can manipulate DNA, which I would need to do as part of my profession," he said. Shortly thereafter, Chris got part-time work as a research assistant in the lab of Dr. Vladimir Titorenko at Concordia University, where he eventually performed his graduate-level research.

At the time, Dr. Titorenko was studying peroxisome division. Found within the cells of animals, plants and humans, peroxisomes are organelles implicated in fat catabolism. They break down the fatty acids consumed by an organism into smaller components that are subsequently used by the organism to produce energy and to protect itself from environmental stressors.

For his PhD thesis, Chris was inspired both by his supervisor's existing work on peroxisome division and by research showing caloric restriction significantly extending lifespan. He found that the same genetic pathway accounts for both phenomena. Although he used yeast as a model organism for his experiments, he was able to generalize the findings to humans, as we possess many of the same genes.

When Chris began teaching at Vanier in 2009, former Biology department Coordinator Dr. Edward Awad and former Dean of the Faculty of Science and General Science Eric Lozowy were very keen on active learning and innovation. They encouraged teachers to go beyond lecturing, in an effort to improve students' acquisition of competencies and trigger deep learning. They encouraged Chris to revisit his postdoctoral research, which ended prematurely when he got his position at Vanier.

Chris is currently conducting FRQNT-funded research in collaboration with his former post-doctoral research supervisor, Dr. Vincent Martin, at Concordia University. Their research involves metabolically engineering yeast cells to produce opioid molecules called benzyli-soquinoline alkaloids. The team at Concordia has recently engineered

yeast to produce morphine. Chris's project is looking at a single step in the pathway towards producing an opioid called noscapine. A gene called cytochrome P450 reductase carries out this step. He and his team are looking at versions of that gene from 12 different plants. "In order to engineer the pathway to make this particular drug, we want to use the version that is most effective at carrying out that step in the pathway," Chris explained.

His best piece of advice to Vanier teachers who wish to conduct research of their own is that they find a university collaborator. In his experience, Dr. Martin's discipline-specific knowledge and support in preparing his grant application were invaluable. In producing his grant application, he also greatly appreciated the support provided to him by Isabelle Delisle, who was coordinator of the PSI office at the time.

Chris is also coordinator of the Research Methods course offered to Science students at Vanier. For this course, students complete 30-40 hours of research-related activities in an established university lab. Chris's FRQNT grant has allowed him to purchase some specialized equipment that now makes it possible for the students to do most of their lab work for the project at Vanier.

Based on his personal experience as a student, Chris anticipated that the Research Methods course would be a great teaching tool. He remembers that hands-on lab work was far more inspiring to him than reading textbooks and answering multiple-choice questions. Chris strongly believes that actively participating in research gives students a better idea of the process of scientific discovery. "They get to experience what the work of a scientist is really like," he said. Feedback from his students in the course has been very positive. Last year, some even came to work in the lab in the semester before the course began and continued to work in the lab in the summer following the completion of their course requirements.

Chris considers that conducting research at Vanier is a great way to incorporate innovative learning approaches into a program. He also considers that it provides a great opportunity for collaboration with other institutions and he hopes to see more research conducted at Vanier in the future.

To read more about Chris's research, visit <http://jcb.rupress.org/content/177/2/289>.



Angela Vavassis  
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## Publications from Vanier Teachers and Staff

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## Honours Awarded to Vanier Teachers and Staff

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In September, **Rachel Jobin** and **Josée Tamiozzo** were honoured as recipients of the *Prix de la ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur* for their innovative teaching strategies.

In October, **Jailson De Lima** received a 2018 Beaumier Award for High School/CÉGEP Chemistry Teachers recognizing the value of his *Art & Science Project*.

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