

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence > Exemplary Practices > 2013

2013 Exemplary Practices



Exemplary Practices 2013

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Welcome



2013 marked the 20th anniversary of the [Prime Minister's Awards \(PMA\) for Teaching Excellence](#). Running in parallel, since 2002, the [PMAs for Excellence in Early Childhood Education \(ECE\)](#) have honoured remarkable educators from across Canada. This incredible journey has involved over 1,600 award recipients from all provinces and territories, five prime ministers, more than 1,200 schools and centres, thousands of students, and an unquantifiable amount of passion and dedication that has already been passed on to another generation. Highlights of this two decades-long celebration of excellence in education can be found in a [short video](#).

The Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines who instil in their students a love of learning and who utilize information and communications technologies to better equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in a 21st century society and economy. The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education honour exceptional ECEs who excel at fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and at helping build the foundation young children need to make the best possible start in life. Each recipient's [biography](#) highlights the innovative practices of some of Canada's most inspirational educators.

Educators may receive one of two Prime Minister's Awards: the *Certificate of Excellence* (national) and the *Certificate of Achievement* (regional). Certificate of Excellence winners are brought to Ottawa to receive their award from the Prime Minister and to participate in a variety of activities, perhaps most importantly, to share their innovative ideas and best teaching practices.

This sharing takes place in a forum open to other educators called "Teacher Talk". Topics for discussion are drawn from recipient's nomination packages and are based on what they feel are their best and most transferable teaching practices. Reflecting the growing trend in Canada toward integration, recipients of both the PMA for Teaching Excellence and for Excellence in Early Childhood Education took part in the same forum this year. Topics for 2013 were: *Using Technology to Connect and Empower*; *Teaching to Inspire and Engage*; *Enabling Success in all Students*; *The Language of Learning*; and, *Teaching beyond the Classroom*. Summaries of these **best practices**, as well as links for the **resources** these educators use regularly in their classrooms and childcare centres can be found in this publication.

As unique as each of the 2013 recipients are, what they all share in common is a tremendous passion for teaching and an

incredible commitment to the students and children in their care. The final speaker of the day, teaching excellence recipient Gina Wong, summed up her fellow speaker's stories with the following found poem drawn from their presentations:

*Everything worth doing is worth doing well.
Teachers are facilitators and co-learners.
Teaching is more than the outcomes.
If they don't learn the way you teach, teach the way they learn.
Give respect to get respect.
Inspire and explore to promote cognitive discussions.
Do not be afraid to try something new: take big bold risks in your own learning.
See the kids in front of you.
Kids have inspired me to connect more with others and to bring fun things to them.
"There but for the grace of God go I".
My learning is incorporated into my students' learning.
Educational empowerment by putting needs of students first.*

*Create a living classroom by creating a sense of belonging.
Every child has a soul - celebrate the moments that take your breath away.
A place to share language lives in a multicultural and multilingual society.
Find their voice through their lived experience.
They gave me the confidence.
Teach from the heart to touch the hearts of the students.
Learning goes beyond the classroom and creates memories.
Value the voice in the learning and the vehicles of learning.
Make a change in the community.
Find passion in their lives and joy in the journey.*

The Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education are administered by Industry Canada in partnership with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Health Canada, The Public Health Agency of Canada, and with the generous support of the RBC Foundation. For information about this program, its partners and recipients, please [contact the program office](#).

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence > Exemplary Practices > 2013

Exploratory Learning in the 21st Century: Inspiring Cognitive Presence in Education



Gabriel Roman Ayyavoo

Notre Dame High School

Toronto, Ontario

Subjects and Grades Taught: Science, Biology, Chemistry for Grades 9 to 12

As a nature lover, I endured the territorial wing smack by Pteropodidae, the black flying fox (bat) in Malaysia and survived the defensive bite by giant venous scolopendra (centipedes) on an island in the South China Sea. In my Cuban dives, nematocyst stings by *millepora complanata* (fire corals) increased my painful appreciation for aquatic camouflage. In *Terre Neuve*, while observing behaviour of *Alces alces*, (moose), I became a food source for blood

seeking tabanids (horseflies). Inspired by the outdoor adventures of Steve Irwin (the Crocodile Hunter), I too share my experiential and exploratory learning as lesson hooks while inspiring cognitive independence for my techno-savvy students.

I embrace teaching of sciences as an opportunity to share "her- and his-stories" of personal experiences in the natural world phenomena. With the aim of empowering every student from varied cultures and backgrounds, I inspire learning through their sensory experiences. Gestalt's approach highlights personal experiences to empower learners, as I inspire learners to explore their interest and take ownership of science learning through investigations. Pushing of content has to stop — technology enables, fosters and empowers students. I am a digital immigrant and by shifting from teacher-directed to student-directed learning; student's stories and experiences entice cognitive restructuring and developing innovative concepts of their world. This is the premise of my constructivist biology teaching to motivate reconstruction of students' ideas through testing and debating before formulating them into their wealth of previous knowledge.

For more than 20 years of teaching in Singapore and Canada, my educational interest recapitulates science literacy for students and teachers employing technology into three areas:

- 21st century learning that embraces different intelligence modalities with student-friendly technologies and software (i.e. tablets, smart phones, applications such as [Edmodo](#), [Jing](#), etc.);
- Developing scientific, technological, societal, ethical and environmental (STSEE) attitudes through online asynchronous discussions; and,
- Training critical cognitive/thinking skills during student-designed Scientific Investigative Projects (SIPs) in technology inspired 21st century science education.

My lessons are accompanied by challenging kinesthetic hands-on procedures and creative minds—on problem-solving strategies. SIPs provide an avenue for both my male and female students to venture into creative, real world investigations while maintaining collaborative online discussions. Examples include: researching new cures with breast cancer cells using broccoli extracts with mentors from Toronto University Hospitals, and using macroinvertebrates as biological indicators to investigate local Don River and stream pollution. Regardless of their topics, students reflect, discuss, collaborate and present their findings through written publication in journals, presentation at conferences and via the all-girls online [Damedetective](#) site.

"I hear I forget, I see I remember, but when I do I understand." This Confucian aphorism is my guiding principle that I share with fellow educators. Teaching to students with diverse backgrounds and varying academic strength, I advocate students to use an "I-Do-I-Understand" problem-solution strategy, and to design and conduct original investigations. This delights and encapsulates learners as they unravel the academic and societal misconceptions.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence > Exemplary Practices > 2013

Teachers, Things You Already Know



[Richard Baker](#)

Bluefield High School

Hampshire, Prince Edward Island

Subjects and Grades Taught: Resource for Grades 10 to 12

500 words to outline best teaching practices, is a tough task. After 35 years of teaching from grade three through to grade 11, there are a few things that come to mind. My reflections will not be new to you, but may help to validate what you already do in your classrooms. You are the expert. You know that even well thought-out plans may have to be scrapped to deal with what faces you at 1:57 p.m. in your classroom. With word count on, here are my best practices:

1. **See the students you have in front of you.** Try to attend the band concerts, drama productions, and athletics. Try to understand their situations and their contexts. Do some of your students come carrying baggage? Are the academic challenges they have, the least of their problems? Understanding that you cannot solve all problems, try to be aware. Empathy is not over rated.
2. **Students (like teachers) learn differently.** There is an increasing number of students with full psychological assessments. These assessments come with a multitude of recommendations and some students are diagnosed with a learning disability. Replacing the "disability" with "differently," is a huge step forward. Also consider that in our public education system not all students who learn differently have an assessment. The waiting lists are long. How many students do we have whose parents cannot afford the cost of a private assessment? Which leads to #3:
3. **Keep our education system public.** Advocate for full funding for public education. We should try to limit and even eliminate all user fees, school fees, athletic fees, field trip fees, etc. Over my career, we have made needed gains in including students who face mental and physical challenges. Another form of exclusion is facing students who are economically disadvantaged. We know there is a correlation between academic success and involvement in school activities.
4. **Success breeds success.** This does not mean that you lower expectations to ensure success. From Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (by another name, scaffolding), learning needs to be challenging. The challenge has to have a good chance of being met with your help. As you know, if students are giving an honest effort and meet only failure, they are going on the exit ramp to disengagement. When there is success, #5 follows.
5. **Celebrate success.** It doesn't have to be elaborate but recognize accomplishments. It does not take much time but students do remember. Toasting success with (my favorite) chocolate milk or "champagne" (pop) is appreciated by all students from elementary through secondary.
6. **Computer technology (computers, touch screen devices, smart phones, etc.) can be a liberating tool for students who struggle with reading, writing, and/or organization skills.** Assistive technology (text-to-speech and speech-to-text) has improved so much in the last five years. Students in the higher grades are willing to use touch screen devices effectively to become independent learners.

Finally, teaching may be the most honourable profession, but it's also becoming more challenging and it is therefore important to exchange ideas and network.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Teaching in the Oral Tradition



Leigh Brown

Children of the Earth High School

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Subjects and Grades Taught: English Language Arts, Psychology, Seminar in Business for Grade 12

What are we going to do for "I Love to Read" month? This simple question started our whole school on a journey of exploration that took five months, and ended with many of our students becoming published authors. As part of our school's cultural mandate, students and staff participate regularly in Aboriginal traditional ceremonies, including pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, and sharing circles. Through these ceremonies, our students and our staff have an opportunity to learn in the same ways that our ancestors learned since time immemorial.

Storytelling, in the oral tradition, has played a significant role in our school, both in everyday use and as part of a very special project undertaken by our whole school. Our students and staff participated in a storytelling project related to the inter-generational effects of the *Indian Residential Schools System* (IRS). Many of our students have been affected by the negative impact the IRS has had on the Aboriginal community in general. In looking for an activity to celebrate "I Love to Read" month, we decided that instead of reading the work of other writers, we would encourage our students to become writers themselves and share their stories with each other.

Through a series of workshops on story telling, we helped our students understand the purpose and function of storytelling historically, and how it could be beneficial to them currently. We demonstrated ways to tell stories orally, as well as through writing, music, and artistic expression. At the end of each story telling session, every student kept a journal about their experiences, their thoughts and their feelings.

After the storytelling workshop series was completed, those students who were interested were invited to share their stories with a wider audience. Written pieces, art work, poetry, and songs were generated by our students as a means of expressing not only the learning that took place in the sharing circles, but also as a catharsis for the feelings that were generated regarding their current life situations based on events over which they did not have any control.

The entire project was successful in helping our students deal with some of the issues that affect the Aboriginal community as a whole. It provided them with an opportunity to express their creativity and develop their stories, synthesizing the issues and events with their personal life experiences and situations. There was no limit to how students could tell their stories; one month turned into five, and ultimately, each of the students who chose to participate is now a published author of a book called *Dreams of Thundering Voices*.

This project is just one example of how traditional means of sharing knowledge can be adapted to the modern world and used in other settings. One does not need to be an Indigenous person, or even to follow Indigenous traditions, in order to effectively use Indigenous methods of teaching to enhance the learning experiences of students. Everyone can benefit from learning in traditional ways, because these ways provide methodology that addresses oral, visual, and kinaesthetic learners in the learning experience.

Date modified: 2014-03-19

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > [2013](#)

My Passion, the Project Method of Teaching



Gérald Charron

École Saint-Joseph

Lévis, Quebec

Subjects and grades taught: Math, French, Ethics, Science, Art and Social Studies for grade 4

What I especially like about being a teacher is that not only do I get to educate the adults of tomorrow, I learn right along with them.

The project method of teaching satisfies my desire to acquire knowledge and skills with my students. Every challenge is an opportunity to better myself, and I love instilling this taste for adventure in my students.

Every year as I think about what my new topic will be, I draw inspiration from current events. I usually develop projects related to UNESCO international and world years. Last year, I came up with a series of activities closely tied to water, because 2013 was the International Year of Water Cooperation. Since 2014 is the International Year of Family Farming, I developed a new project relating to both water and family farming. My main concern when presenting these activities to my students is to provide a hands-on learning experience closely tied to current events and to get as many people as possible involved. A long time ago I started building these projects around science experiments, because I know it is a great way of getting young people interested, especially boys.

Project activities run from September to June. Students know going in that they will have to share the results of their research and experiments with the class, which helps regulate their work methods. They also have to present all of their work and skills as part of an exhibit organized at the school every April. I would say that this is the high point of the project. It is all about sharing knowledge with the other students at the school, parents, school staff, sponsors and the community.

Every subject matter taught in elementary school is called into play as part of the project, with a particular focus on science and social studies. It is easy to make connections with our ancestors' history and the way they used water and the land in the time of New France. French is very prevalent, with the students reading and writing various texts following their research. Oral communication is also a constant—not only do students work in teams, they also share their findings with other classes.

Ethics and religious culture add another dimension to the discussion on environmental issues. Surveys on water consumption are conducted and suggestions for preventing overuse are made. Statistics and charts are established in math. Art also plays a big role in my projects: we discuss Frédéric Back and his movie titled *The Mighty River*, among other things. There are activities connected with his work; we build models of lordships; etc.

As part of these activities, my students work closely with other classes at the school, including autistic students, and we exchange letters with students in other provinces and countries. This way, the class keeps a window permanently open to the world!

Project links:

[Submission to the "@nime ta francophonie" contest](#)

[Radio-Canada report on the integration of an autism spectrum disorder transition class and the Prime Minister's Award](#) [French only]

Blog with our French correspondents for the [Regards croisés Loire-St-Laurent project](#) [French only]

Date modified: 2014-03-26

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence > Exemplary Practices > 2013

Education for ALL: Closing the Achievement Gap with the Use of Technology



Aviva Dunsiger

Ancaster Meadow Elementary School

Ancaster, Ontario

Subjects and Grades Taught: Literacy, Numeracy, Math, Science, Social Studies for Grade 6

How do you reach students that struggle? As a teacher, I'm committed to teaching all students how to learn, and that often includes students that have experienced academic difficulties in the past. The purposeful use of technology allows me to close the achievement gap and ensure academic success for every student.

This quote is signature on my Board e-mails: "If they don't learn the way you teach, teach the way they learn." Nothing inspires me more as a teacher than this phrase. In grade two, I was identified with a non-verbal learning disability, and if it weren't for amazing parents and incredible teachers that helped me find strategies that worked, I wouldn't be where I am today.

In the classroom, I'm dedicated to helping all students succeed. Getting students to make audio or video recordings, allows those that struggle with writing to still share their learning with others. Having students use [Dragon Dictation](#) to write through talking, helps struggling writers succeed. Using [WordQ](#), both as an app and as a computer program, assists students that have spelling difficulties. Even better, they can listen back to what they wrote, hear their run-on sentences, and correct them. This allows for increased independence and student success. When our classroom started using and sharing information through an online student radio station, students started reading more to have something to talk about. Technology has given my students a voice.

While these ideas may sound good on paper, it took time to put them into practice. Students were initially reluctant to use a different tool, even if it helped them learn. This meant that I needed to reconsider my teaching practices. It was no longer about most students completing their work on paper, and a few students completing it on the computer. Instead, I needed to make "student choice" available for all. I now start with the expectations, and let students choose the best way to share their learning with me – be it on a device or paper. We're all different, and we all learn differently. Learning doesn't have to look the same for everyone. My classroom is different from a regular classroom and if you were to come in on a regular day, you would find little pockets of people doing things in different ways.

Now when I plan my lessons, I think about what Em DeSordo, a principal in our Board, said when addressing our school staff last year: "I know how to teach fractions. I just don't know how to teach fractions to kids that don't get it." Looking at student strengths and needs helps me as I plan for success. As an example, when creating a Social Studies project on Canada's trading partners, I looked at the number of students in my class that had reading and writing difficulties. How would I help them access the resources and demonstrate their understanding? I started with finding videos that discussed the key facts. I rewrote some of the online resources to make them easier to understand. I also recorded some of the textbook information. Then I provided choices for how students could share their learning: recording podcasts, making posters, creating claymation movies, making PowerPoint presentations, or getting creative and suggesting their own project. With so much choice, every student succeeded and with excellent results!

Nothing is more fulfilling as a teacher than knowing that you made a difference. Technology helps me make this difference each and every day and truly create that success for all.

Date modified: 2014-03-19

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > [2013](#)

It's a matter of heart...



Angelina Fabien

Deninu School

Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories

Subjects and Grades Taught: Chipewyan Language / Northwest Territories for K to 12

I am a Chipewyan Language Instructor at Deninu School, a small K to 12 school located in Fort Resolution, Northwest Territories. When I was first hired, none of my students spoke the Chipewyan language, the ancestral language of the community. Fort Resolution was home to one of Canada's first Residential Schools and through this experience, many of the parents and grandparents of my students had lost their language. Although many longed to speak it, the

community had few fluent speakers and with the passing of each elder, the hope for a revival of the language dimmed.

It is within this setting that I began my career as a teacher and Aboriginal Language Instructor at Deninu School. Prior to my arrival, students had been instructed in their language for several years but the language remained locked in the classroom. Unlike their parents, the students had little interest in learning their language primarily because it held little relevancy to them. It was seldom heard outside of the classroom. My challenge was to change this mindset and to walk the language out in to the hallways, into the school yard and beyond. For that to happen I had to create a sense that the language was important and had relevancy to their everyday lives.

The journey towards this transformation started with a single Chipewyan word *?edlānet'e*—a meaning "How are you?" I asked this of every student as they entered the building each and every day. Soon some were asking to learn the response in Chipewyan—"I am fine," or "I am tired"—which I happily taught. It wasn't long before the students were greeting each other as they entered the school or saw their friends on the playground. Students shared their newfound language with their teachers and parents and each enthusiastically embraced their efforts to speak the Chipewyan language and challenged them for even more. I was only too pleased to satisfy the students' requests for more language.

This simple beginning has led to a revitalization of the language throughout the community. In the school setting, the language is now spoken on afternoon announcements and it is common to hear students talking to one another in Chipewyan. The signage in the school has been changed to Chipewyan and many teachers now support the program by greeting the children and issuing simple commands in the language. Through this whole experience the students have found relevance and purpose in learning their language.

Parents too have become great supporters. Their child's enthusiasm for the language and expanding fluency has sparked renewed interest in many homes. In some, the children themselves have become the teachers and it is not uncommon for the child to teach their parents and siblings the new words, phrases and sentences learned in the Chipewyan language class.

The language now belongs to the community. The youth, through their enthusiasm and interest have led this revival and have walked the language out of the doors of the school and into the community. There is now hope that the language will grow and thrive.

The lessons I have learned are many but the most important lesson is that we, as Aboriginal language teachers, must always teach from the heart because when we do, we touch the hearts of our students. That is what will make the difference and ensure the survival of our ancestral languages.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Building Historical Empathy and Engagement in the Classroom



Adrian French

Mount Douglas Secondary School

Victoria, British Columbia

Subjects and Grades Taught: Social Studies, History, Physical Education for Grades 9 to 12

How could a high school student ever begin to empathize with a soldier in the trenches of the First World War? This question drove me to explore the potential of a cross-curricular approach for my high school students. A project-based approach to curriculum can build historical empathy and increases engagement in his classroom.

At the core of an authentic historical education is awareness that history is a reflection of the context from whence it arose. Students should constantly re-evaluate past decisions while assessing current events. Where would we be without understanding Canada's early quest for national autonomy, for instance, while looking to understand contemporary national and international politics? To help address this instructional challenge I have adopted a project-based methodology while looking to create rigour, relevance and relationships—the three tenants of an authentic education for each student's educational journey. Project-based teaching allows me to stimulate intellectual curiosity while enabling students to develop the knowledge and skills needed to find value, not only within history as a discipline, but also beyond the classroom. Throughout my courses students are able to present unique, focused, and personal responses to historical issues, while working within the provincial curriculum.

As a teacher, I am aware that our education system is a dynamic paradigm. I constantly re-evaluate my professional standards and instructional practices in order to meet the constant changes that occur in both education and society. While planning lessons I ask questions such as, "Why is this important in my discipline?" and "Why is this important to kids?" In short, I believe that the project-based approach to teaching enhances our youths' understanding of the 20th century Canadian history, knowledge our nation's quest for autonomy and their place in Canada and the world, and ultimately develops awareness of their unlimited potential as Canadians.

Regardless of course content, grade level and academic intent, our educational methods must focus on inherent potential for success in each of our students. The key to developing a rich and engaging educational experience is conscious and consistent attention to multiple learning styles present in students. Dynamic differentiated educational instruction must be planned if all learning types are to tap into their intellectual and creative potential. It is here that my greatest struggles lie. I lean on my personal learning traits as I develop lessons and projects. It is essential that I open my thought process to all potential avenues for success in all learners in my class, not just the ones who think like me.

To help me continue to refine my teaching skills, I have always sought out the advice and experience of my colleagues. I have benefitted, and continue to benefit, from the professional learning community of teachers in the Victoria region. Working formally through professional development seminars, or more significantly, informally with individual teachers, I have benefitted from the collective experience of the senior teachers from whom I seek advice, and the passion and new ideas of the junior teachers I mentor and collaborate with.

While I have developed my pedagogical skills and personal teaching practice with the help of many wonderful teachers, it is the students in my class that truly have shaped my career. Working with our youth is demanding, trying and wonderful. What a joy it is to go to work each day knowing that I will learn more from my students than they will learn from me!

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Infusing Authentic Self-Acceptance - and a Risk Taking *I Can Do* Creative Cooperative Spirit in the Young Developing Student – Are We Up to the Task?



[Viviane Gaudreault](#)

First Avenue Public School

Ottawa, Ontario

Subjects and Grades Taught: French Immersion (Math, Language Arts, Physical Education, Science) for Grade 2

The teaching pedagogy topic that I have selected addresses childhood emotional development and the need for preparing the young student to effectively operate in an unfamiliar competitive environment with others, and in a manner that enables each student, with a fully acknowledged entitlement, to explore themselves, their particular abilities, and learning opportunities in their rapidly changing and stressful world. Like a ship, in an armada, heading across the rough uncharted ocean on an expedition, the student needs to be sea worthy, be sailed with knowledge and skills, and be set and maintained on a true course.

This requirement for effective networks of citizen preparedness is more pressing. The world is changing as no one could ever imagine. World competitiveness and ever increasing threats to our resources and our sovereignty, demands more of us all. We need citizens that are emotionally intact, resilient, highly adaptable, industrious, persevering, courageous, capable and well-informed. And our preparedness, in meeting global challenges, starts with the developing of an authentic, confident, creative, self accepting, self aware, co-operative, ethical child, with a sense of his or her rights and responsibilities. We need to become "Big Picture Thinkers" and work with greater effectiveness as a burden of responsibility falls as never before on teachers.

It is my position that children who are stressed or emotionally upset just can't learn and perform, and that young children need to be conditioned to work effectively, cooperatively, and creatively. It is also my position that emotional development and life skills development succeed when parents are fully integrated into the process and children are put on a path of self-discovery and acceptance.

It naturally follows that we should also ask ourselves if emotional development is an implicit and assumed requirement for young students in the educational system (and I'm not sure that it is), and are teachers, with respect to current realities, selected and trained up to the task in respect to their emotional temperament, philosophies, strategies, and practices? It makes you wonder! And, we should ask ourselves, with respect to relevance and effectiveness in setting and maintaining a true course, are learning and core life skills sufficiently identified and in place to accomplish this objective?

I have to ask myself these questions in face of educational realities and what is covered by the media regarding the rise of mental illness in children, as well as student stress that I have faced every day in my classroom. If children are too stressed to learn and the fundamental building blocks in mathematics and language skills are not present by the end of grade two, it is very difficult for the child to be able to catch up and keep up. There is no safety net for children with serious emotional problems so it is essential that an effective strategy and program of prevention is put in place.

I have taken a holistic approach to my teaching practice and developed a program that is based on educational empowerment. The program is system driven and system interdependent, and moves away from silo approach to a more organic approach. It puts the needs of the students first and starts with a total commitment to a student's long-range preparedness. A mechanical process that is purely curriculum-driven is seen too often and does not work for everyone. Teaching has to be meaningful to the student and must empower the students. We must prepare students for life.

Date modified: 2014-03-19

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Get Them Out of Their Seats



Brian Jackson

Ralph McCall School

Airdrie, Alberta

Subjects and Grades Taught: Science, Social Studies, Math, LA, PhysEd for Grades 6 to 8

The things that we want our students to remember from their years in school aren't always the lessons that we share with them with the teacher at the front and the kids taking notes and answering questions. While the writing and the reflection is important, the things they really hang onto are the times they have been engaged away from their desk. These are some examples that have worked for me.

I'm sure we have all walked out of a hard day at school and were really happy with the way that a lesson worked out. The kids were interactive and answered your questions. They seemed to "get it". Maybe they even said, "That was really cool!" They truly understood what you were sharing with them. Those are great days! But there is so much more to look forward to! Once I know they have the pre-requisite skills, the fun can really begin.

I look forward to finding opportunities for my students to get out of their seats and have fun showing me what they have learned. We have built and tested experimental airplanes. We have launched rockets of all varieties and all sorts of designs. When not allowed to use the school roof, we collaborated on alternative ideas to drop parachutes and eggs. Science concepts are much more "real" when the learning is away from their desks.

In math, we have measured the length of stride of a student in each grade in our school so we could calculate how many steps to various locations around our province. We used pies on Pi Day to find its approximate value. Jelly beans have become the perfect tool for creating ratios and calculating percentages. Math becomes more real when it is more than just a textbook and quizzes.

Instead of reading about living in space, students have had the opportunity to use amateur radio to speak to an astronaut on the space station. When we wanted to know about constellations in the southern hemisphere, we used radio to speak to an astronomer in Australia and he told us what he could see. Thanks to amateur radio again, we had the chance to speak to a Canadian professor on Mount Everest about fitness and nutrition.

Learning does not stop when the students walk out of the classroom. On weekends, we have a space science club that builds and launches rockets, hosts star parties for the community and shares what we have learned about planets and stars. Students create and share their own public presentations on various astronomical topics. They become the experts. They have launched, tracked and recovered large helium balloons once we understood the various layers of wind up to 100,000 feet. They worked together in teams to send requests for photos to the camera on the space station. They clearly understand how to find ideal locations with unique geological features, predict the path of the station, and forecast the weather around the planet in order to have the camera take amazing pictures.

We all remember those times when the learning went beyond our desks and books. I have been lucky enough to be a part of those memories for my students. I look forward to more of those chances to get them out of their seats!

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence > Exemplary Practices > 2013

How to Do More without Burning Out



Photo by Ian Cryslar /
 Courtesy of *Professionally Speaking*,
 Ontario College of Teachers

[Vernon Kee](#)

Danforth Collegiate Technical Institute

Toronto, Ontario

Subjects and Grades Taught: Technology, Design, Careers, Computers for Grades 9 to 12

They say teachers are most likely to quit from burnout in the first five years of their career. Usually these teachers are the ones who take on too much, either from the great needs they see in their community or in their own drive to do their best. As one who constantly pushes the boundary for burnout, I can definitely say that the following three things have helped me survive my first five years of teaching:

1. **Avoid taking on any extracurricular alone.** If you want to start a club, coach a team, or run tutoring, bring in as much help as possible. Put a message out for teachers to see if anyone wants to help. Make the club as autonomous as possible by building it around a student leader. Now the club can run while you eat lunch and do prep work. Put word out to the community because there are many people who love to get involved and give back to the educational system. Be the catalyst, not the main pillar.
2. **Keep a record of your victories.** When I first started teaching, veteran Danforth teacher Tanya Neub said to me that it was really hard every day when she was first teaching and she kept feeling down about her shortcomings. Her mom, who was also a teacher, told her to write a sticky note on the fridge about one good thing that happened every day. A few weeks later, the fridge would be full of notes. It is easy for the bad things to cover the memories of good ones. You have to look at how you're changing the school, and not what you missed. It also really helps to have a journal. You'd be amazed how much you grow and change and journaling helps give you the full picture and reflect on who you are at the moment. It's a lot of fun too if you make a section on things your students said that made you laugh.
3. **Use technology.** My classroom is now paperless. Those PowerPoint lessons you made in the summer mean you don't have to prep all year or any other year you teach the course (except for updates of course). [Moodle](#), making your own website and [Google Docs](#) help a lot! The greatest teaching tool I ever used was a student feedback survey because it let me know what I was doing right, and how I could improve. It helped me realize that some of the boys in my class were making inappropriate comments and I was able to adapt a lesson to discuss sexual harassment. It empowers your students and sets an example for them of what continuous improvement means.

Go out there and do everything you can to make a difference, but above all take care of yourself and your well being by making sure you have dedicated downtime for family, friends and self growth. Any time you start to feel guilty for not doing enough work, or like school is a steamroller that is eventually going to run you over, seek support from mentors and other teachers to help keep you afloat!

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Engaging Hard to Reach Inner City Learners



Janey (Min-Wah) Lee

Thunderbird Elementary School

Vancouver, British Columbia

Subjects and Grades Taught: Kindergarten

Fifteen years ago I started teaching at Thunderbird Elementary School, a needy inner city school on Vancouver's east side, and directly across the street from the largest social housing project in British Columbia. Students come from immigrant families, are refugees, or come from single parent households. Many are on social assistance and living in poverty. At first, I had difficulty connecting with the students but soon I realized that I was working with children

with limited English language skills and limited life experiences. I needed to change my approach to teaching to help inspire and engage these "hard to reach learners". I decided to make learning more captivating and fun by sharing some of my passions with them.

One of the ways I create an innovative and stimulating learning environment is by teaching my kindergarten class about one of Canada's biggest sports – hockey. Being an avid Vancouver Canucks fan myself, I share this passion with my kindergarten class in creative ways to help support student learning. For instance, during the playoffs in the spring, I bring each of my students a Canucks t-shirts to wear on game days. My students enthusiastically participate in a variety of language arts, math, and art activities and fun lessons. They craft a t-chart to help predict winning teams; they make picture graphs showing their favourite players; they learn each player's number; and they design their own jerseys. My students learn important life skills such as communication, fairness, reliability, compassion and collaboration. Our classroom was even featured in the *Vancouver Province* newspaper and interviewed by *CKNW Radio* about how I creatively integrate hockey into my teaching.

Another passion of mine is cooking. Students participate in a cooking activity every two weeks, which is integrated into the theme for that period. My kindergarten students work in small and large groups to help measure, mix, wash and cut the ingredients we use. These activities help students develop a love of cooking, encourages them in trying new and different foods and promotes healthy food choices. They also learn to work together in a fun and hands-on way while learning important math, language and social skills. I also collaborate with parents and grandparents and engage them in student learning through our cooking projects and by encouraging them to be our "culture experts".

Furthermore, I passionately believe that students learn best by doing and I provide my class with a hands-on and minds-on learning environment. For example, we participate in weekly science activities and experiments and I encourage the children to be scientists who hypothesize, experiment, and make careful observations with their five senses. Last year, our school developed a community partnership with the [Society for Promoting Environmental Conservation](#) (SPEC) to teach students about food safety, how to grow organic fruits and vegetables, and how to start a school garden. With the help of a local high school teacher and his students, we built four wooden planters for a school garden, which became an outdoor classroom and a source of inspiration for math, science, art, social studies, language arts and cooking lessons. These experiences have really helped make our students more socially responsible, caring and proactive citizens at home, at school and within the community.

The biggest lesson I've learned after almost 20 years of teaching is to not be afraid to try something new, innovative and creative in order to meet the various learning needs of our diverse group of students. Take big, bold risks in your teaching and your efforts will help inspire, engage and revitalize your students' passion with their own learning.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Inspiring Students to Achieve Their Full Potential



Margaret Murphy

Templeton Secondary School

Vancouver, British Columbia

Subjects and Grades Taught: Chef Training, Culinary Arts for Grades 10 to 12

My goal as a teacher was to inspire youth to achieve their greatest potential within a community of dedicated mentors who could guide their way. I taught in an unusual classroom—a teaching cafeteria—in 1989 there were 12 special needs students and a kitchen staff preparing lunch for 80 people. Twenty-four years later, the program evolved to include 160 students of multi-academic ability and seven staff preparing food for 500-800 people per day, and catering to a myriad of community events.

Templeton Secondary School students come from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The challenge for me was to get students to understand how learning the skills and concepts within this educational environment would enrich and change their entire lives for the better. My approach was to go beyond the borders of the traditional classroom. Within the classroom, students learn not only culinary and baking skills, but they also learn about collaboration, work ethics, time management, leadership, organization and communication. As these skills develop, students are able to practice and display their abilities in many venues in the community. In so doing, they receive feedback and affirmation that build self-confidence, ease transition to the work force or post-secondary education, and help them integrate into the community.

These were some of the opportunities offered to students, they were encouraged them to participate in as many as possible:

- **Community outreach:** Students prepare food for organizations in the City of Vancouver. One particular event is Homeground, where students prepare and serve 1,500 meals, over three days, to people in need in Vancouver's downtown eastside. Many of the students come from homes as impoverished as the people they are serving, yet they are excited to give back to the community.
- **Culinary competitions:** Students prepare food in front of an audience, similar to the televised *Iron Chef* competitions. Teams of three compete using a special ingredient; they make an appetizer, entrée and dessert featuring that ingredient. Students are required to research their project and through cross-curricular bridging, they realize a need for competency in mathematics, chemistry, and English to accomplish their task. Through the process of practicing towards excellence, cooking in front of groups as large as 500 people and the media, and being adjudicated by top Canadian chefs, students develop confidence, focus and flexibility.
- **Work and life transitions:** Through working relationships with local restaurants, many students have entered the industry in a joint school/industry apprenticeship. Fundamental to this work experience is an ongoing relationship with these establishments so that students are given every opportunity to succeed and transition into the world of work and in many cases an apprenticeship.
- **Mentoring:** Through interaction with past graduates and top chefs in the industry and colleges, students acquire skills and have a chance to learn strategies that professionals have used to become successful. As a result, students recognize that they, too, can become successful.
- **Travel opportunities with a focus on food:** Many students have travelled to countries such as France, Spain, Italy, the United States and Japan; have experienced a variety of classes at schools such as the Culinary Institute of America, Cordon Bleu and La Notre; and have participated in tours of locally grown or produced foods such as truffles and Parmesan cheese.

From the first day of school, students learn to take ownership of their learning through leadership opportunities in daily class activities and meaningful, authentic topics in their lives, such as cultural awareness and children's basic rights. By finding passions, students gain a sense of purpose, and that they can make significant, valuable contributions to the class, school, community and world.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

SPACE JAM - Dare to Think Mighty Dreams



[Maria Nickel](#)

Woodlands Elementary

Woodlands, Manitoba

Subjects and Grades Taught: Technology, Science, Math, Art for K to Grade 8

How does a teacher inspire a generation of science enthusiasts through real-life, hands-on space science? My answer is a space jam of unique, learning, exploration and being a real scientist in real time. My focus will be on the programs I run at school: the *Space Knights Space Club* and the *Student Spaceflight Experiment Program*.

My students know me as Commander Nickel. I wear a blue astronaut flight suit in space club, on field trips, and in science classes; it is my hook with the kids. They know when I have the suit on, amazing fun is about to happen. I have run the *Space Knights Space Club* for the last five years for grades six to eight; I was inspired by attending the [Honeywell Educators @ Space Academy Program](#) and have since collaborated with people on space-related projects around the world.

All space club members must apply and write an essay to be in the club; they must be a positive role model, have strong academics and be a team player. My space club kids critique and test NASA prototype elementary experiments for NASA education; attend workshops on robotics and astronomy; participate in hands-on experiments; and run a space riot to teach the school about space science fun.

I was able to involve Dr. Jeff Goldstein, US Director of the [Student Spaceflight Experiment Program](#) (SSEP), in a chat with my students. He encouraged me to apply for and be the Director of SSEP for our division. Eight elementary schools of 450 kids in our division participated in conducting a local Flight Experiment Design Competition. Student teams competed to fly an experiment to the International Space Station (ISS). An elementary experiment to the ISS was a first for Manitoba, Canada and internationally. This program allowed for student ownership in exploration, science as journey of discovery, and pure excitement.

The benefit of this program has been beyond just enthusiasm for science from students K-Grade 8 across our school and the school division. Students wanted to participate and wanted to work extra hard on science. I have students in kindergarten building and showing me their robots made out of recycled materials, and other kids stopping me in the hallway telling me how excited they are to apply to be in my space club. The hook has been that they get to send an experiment they designed to be tested in space.

Finding a hook is a best practice that can be transferred to other educators to gets kids excited and asking for more. It is not just for science, but can be transferred to any subject. We can supply the passionate hook and those kids will fly and show you that the impossible is possible.

To participate in the [Student Spaceflight Experiment Program](#), please visit <http://ssep.ncesse.org/>.

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[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > 2013

Learning Through Hands-on Experiences for Students and the Teacher



[Kristen Sawyers](#)

Simon Alaittuq School

P.O. Bag 002

Rankin Inlet, Nunavut

Subjects and Grades Taught: Math, Science, English LA, Social Studies for Grade 6

Teaching in Nunavut has afforded me many unique opportunities and experiences as an educator. Incorporating Inuit traditions, and culture through the Inuuqatigiit curriculum, have shown me the value of teaching beyond the classroom walls. My professional practice has

evolved to incorporate land-based learning, project-based learning, and volunteer travel. This hands-on, student-centered, experiential learning approach has become the basis of my teaching philosophy and a best practice in my classroom.

Nunavut, what an inspiring place to be an educator, the land surrounding your school, the Inuit culture and a curriculum that supports teaching outside of the traditional classroom and a school that promotes a restitution approach to behaviour. Having taught here for nine years, I continue to be in awe of all the possibilities for engaging students in their learning. Some of the many opportunities I have had are Science and Culture Camps, chaperoning students at the Regional and National Science Fairs, chaperoning students on a summer volunteer trip to Botswana, and most recently engaging my students on individual education plans in project-based learning. Finding creative ways to connect the curriculum to the Inuit culture and promote leadership in my classroom has allowed me to cultivate my passion for teaching. The more hands on I am, the happier they are and this helps with getting through curricular outcomes in a way that has a lasting impact on the students.

This approach to teaching and connecting with my students has allowed me numerous positive experiences over the years. Attendance has improved, behaviour management is minimal, and students seem happier to be at school, engaged and excited to learn. Traveling to Botswana to volunteer with students was an enriching experience for me and the group.

[Northern Youth Abroad](#) gives high school students a chance to earn high school credits in the summer, and also the opportunity to draw parallels between their own culture and the San culture. Students also learn leadership skills, independence and had the chance to travel and volunteer. The land trips I have taken students on have given us a chance to learn from elders, enjoy the land, connect as a class, and allow the students to show leadership, and become the teacher. The experiences are used as teachable moments, and references when using a cross-curricular approach. Project-based learning has revolutionized my differentiated instruction in the classroom; students who were not engaged have now become the leaders in the classroom and the school. Some of the most memorable projects have been fundraising for the [Terry Fox Foundation](#), building a dog house, and making a soap stone carving. The students have taken pride in their work, and are engaged in the entire learning process.

My advice to educators that want to take learning outside the classroom walls is to try it! I have used this approach in Ontario and Nunavut, and although it's a bit more paperwork in Ontario, the benefits are visible in any classroom. Look for community resources or parents who are willing to help support the learning outside of the classroom. It could be as simple as an international picnic on your school playground to celebrate a country you are learning about in Social Studies. The projects can happen at your back table, playground, kitchen, or outdoor education centres, if available. The connection you build with your students; the love of learning and the positive effect it will have on your class; and your professional practice make the extra planning time worth it! Start small, and build on your experiences once you gain confidence.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence > Exemplary Practices > 2013

Cross-cultural Connections in the Digital Age



Gregory Smith

Amalgamated Academy

Bay Roberts, Newfoundland and Labrador

Subjects and Grades Taught: All subjects, (apart from core French in Gr.5) for Grades 5 and 6

[Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), e-mail, and blogging are all are ways in which our students use the Internet everyday to make connections within their own circle of family and friends. But how much are they used to make connections with the world outside? We assume that this technology has led to a more global village where our children are more aware of world events and more accepting and understanding of various cultures. Is this really what is happening?

I come from a small school in rural Newfoundland. In working with students at the elementary level, I have always been fascinated with how little they know of the world and the events that take place outside of their own community. Our current curriculum in both Religious Education and Social Studies encourages an understanding and acceptance of other people and cultures. This concept is paramount to making our world the "global village" that we all desire. Although our students have the ability to do so at their fingertips, to a great extent, I feel this is not happening.

With this in mind, I set out to explore options that allowed my students to interact with other students in other cultures around the world. With the assistance of our Learning Resources Teacher, we explored both the [Global Virtual Classroom](#) (GVC) project as well as [ePals](#) as a means of connecting our students with students in other cultures and countries.

ePals is a collection of web-based tools that provides an opportunity for students around the world to connect and collaborate with other students in a virtual cultural exchange. Each of my students was set up with three ePals from other countries, including Poland, Sweden, Russia and Indonesia and Africa. We wanted our students to experience a variety of cultures that were uniquely different from their own. Students exchanged e-mails with their ePals on a weekly basis. The discussion topic for each week was determined by the students but had to be based on a topic that related to the study of world culture (e.g. music, clothing, food, education, etc.). Students kept an electronic journal of ideas that they could use later to put together in a PowerPoint presentation of the various cultures they were connecting with. Our ePals project also took on a life of its own when our ePal friends from Poland and our class began an exchange of posted Christmas cards and valentines, as well as pictures of their school and their classroom activities.

With the GVC, we completed a group study of an individual country based on cultural similarities and differences. We connected with students in the United States and Japan and created an exchange of ideas where our students discussed a variety of topics ranging from their favorite music, foods, clothing, education, religion, etc. We created and edited a video of our school day that included an overview of our daily activities, and exchanged it with a class from Japan. Our students saw that, although there were great differences in our everyday lives, children from other countries and other cultures were, in reality, no different than they were. The approach taken with GVC was slightly different than ePals. Again, these were also presented in our class at the end of the school year.

My participation in both these projects helped me accomplish my objectives. It provided our students not only with an exposure and a better understanding of the cultural aspects of other countries, but also a unique opportunity for our students to make a cultural connection with their peers throughout our world.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > [2013](#)

Building Foundations: Global Citizenship begins in Kindergarten



[Gina Wong](#)

Florence Nightingale School

Vancouver, British Columbia

Subjects and Grades Taught: Kindergarten

All students can be successful in their learning. Young children can be active citizens who can contribute to their community and beyond. Young children are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and to share their knowledge with the whole class through class presentations, in small groups as emerging readers, and with individuals through peer feedback in writing.

My kindergarten classroom is in an urban inner city school. From day one, my students are invited to use the same tools as the teacher—they identify and read their names using the interactive whiteboard, and by the second month of school, student leaders conduct opening day routines. Students are immersed in rich, diverse learning opportunities that allow them to work with numerous members and partners in the community such as, cooking with family members to celebrate their heritage, caring for the school garden with our parents, designing thank you cards for the school centennial with an artist in residence, and collaborating with older buddies on a multimedia art project. Early on, in spite of the many challenges and disadvantages that my kindergarten students face, they learn that their world of learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom and they can make significant, valuable contributions to the class, school, community and world.

One example of this was a notable project when my kindergarten students studied the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, in collaboration with a grade one class and students from the University of British Columbia. My students learned about the key themes of the declarations that were most relevant to children's everyday lives. Through various songs, books, videos, websites and personal stories from teachers and peers, students were able to identify with other children while recognizing the different challenges that they may face – such as not being allowed to play, attend school, have a home, access to healthy food or be with family as freely. We created body silhouettes, which stated various rights of the child and they were posted around the school to share their learning with others.

With growing awareness and understanding of basic rights for all children, my young learners began to inquire and discuss what they could do to help other children in the world. With guidance, we decided to create a children's market to raise funds to help other children in developing countries. Students worked on a number of crafts—puppets, tie-dye bandanas and music makers—to sell. After setting up the student made crafts on the gym floor, the whole school community funneled in to buy the products as the kindergarten and grade one students explained the purpose of the Children's Market to them. We raised over \$300, which the children decided to put towards sponsoring a child to attend school in Uganda.

Students were empowered in knowing that their learning and work had an important impact on someone's life beyond their immediate community. This continues to be a key underpinning of my ongoing teaching practice as I work with various classes and groups of children: How do we instill in young learners that regardless of their age, as socially responsible global citizens they can make valuable contributions to the lives of others—in their immediate family, their broader community and even in the world.

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > **2013**

2013 Exemplary Practices



Exemplary Practices 2013

[Welcome](#) | [Articles](#) | [Resources](#) | [Partners](#)

Resources

Online tools/communities

- [Bitstrips](#)
- [Comic Life](#)
- [Crayon Physics](#)
- [Dame Detective Blog](#)
- [Dropbox](#)
- [Edmondo](#)
- [Epals](#)
- [Global Virtual Classroom Glogster](#)
- [Google Docs](#)
- [Investopedia](#)
- [Jing](#)
- [KIVA](#)
- [Moodle](#)
- [Phoster: Make your own poster](#)
- [PollEverywhere](#)
- [Rouxbe](#)
- [Skitch](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [Skype in the Classroom](#)
- [Today's Meet](#)
- [Toontube](#)
- [VoiceThread](#)

Organizations

- [Arts Smarts](#)
- [Canadian Space Agency](#)
- [Dairy Farmers of Ontario](#)
- [Nicenet.org](#)
- [Student Spaceflight Experiment Program](#)
- [VoiceThread](#)

Software and Applications

- AudioBoo
- Dragon Dictation
- Facetime
- KidPix
- Pixie 3
- PixnTell
- Toontastic
- Word Q

Blogs

- [Kidblog](#)
- [Live with Livescribe](#)

- [We inspire futures](#)

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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [Exemplary Practices](#) > [2013](#)

2013 Exemplary Practices



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[Welcome](#) | [Articles](#) | [Resources](#) | [Partners](#)

Partners



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Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

[Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence](#) > [About us](#)

About us

Launched in 1993, the Prime Minister's Awards (PMA) for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative elementary and secondary school teachers in all disciplines who instil in their students a love of learning and who utilize information and communications technologies to better equip their students with the knowledge and skills needed to excel in a 21st century society and economy. Running in parallel since 2002, the PMA for Excellence in Childhood Education honour outstanding and innovative early childhood educators who excel at fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and at helping build the foundation children need to make the best possible start in life. Since the creation of the Program, over 1,600 remarkable teachers and educators were honoured and more than 1,200 schools and centres have been recognized.

The PMA for Teaching Excellence are administered by Industry Canada on behalf of the Prime Minister and with the gracious support of the [RBC Foundation](#) and [Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada](#).

- [Awards](#)
 - [Exemplary Practices](#)
 - [Selection Committee](#)
 - [Contact Us](#)
-

Awards

The Awards, offered at the **Certificate of Excellence (national)** and **Certificate of Achievement (regional)** levels, carry cash prizes of \$5,000 and \$1,000 respectively. Each recipient receives a pin, as well as a letter and a certificate signed by the Prime Minister.

Certificates of Excellence are awarded to the ten top-ranked teachers and up to 25 of the next top-ranked nominees each receive a Certificate of Achievement. At least one award (Excellence or Achievement) is designated for each of the following regions: British Columbia; Prairies; Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut; Ontario; Quebec; and Atlantic Canada. In addition, at least one Certificate of Excellence and one Certificate of Achievement are awarded to top-ranked Aboriginal teachers.

Certificate of Excellence recipients may also be invited to participate in best practice sessions and to attend an awards presentation with the Prime Minister, or his designate, traditionally held in Ottawa. Certificate of Achievement recipients are honoured at local school or community events involving school principals, peers, students, and local Members of Parliament or local leaders, as appropriate.

Exemplary Practices

Promoting the exemplary practices of PMA recipients is a major focus of this program. We are committed to sharing the innovative ideas and creative approaches of the award winners with other national level recipients from across Canada. Award-winning teachers ranging from kindergarten to grade 12 participate in "**Teacher's Talk**"—a forum where they can convey their best practices and most memorable moments as teachers. Reflecting the growing trend in Canada toward integration, recipients of both the PMA for Teaching Excellence and for Excellence in Early Childhood Education take part in the same forum. Read more on the [best practices](#) of some of Canada's most outstanding teachers.

Selection Committee

Considered Canada's top honour for K-12 teachers, the PMA is not an easy award to win. Recipients are selected through a rigorous two-tier process involving expert reviewers which include parent/teacher associations, teachers' federations, provincial/territorial ministries of education, and [major education stakeholders](#) from across Canada. Nominees are evaluated based on how well they meet the [selection criteria](#) and judged on their overall and ongoing merits as teachers.

Contact Us

If you have any questions about the PMA program, please [contact the program office](#). If you would like to receive regular updates on the PMA program, we invite you to sign up for our [email distribution list](#).

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