

Knowing the why

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Once a week, the Lethbridge Herald publishes a column written by a superintendent of one of five school jurisdictions in the Lethbridge area. This week's column is authored by Chris Smeaton, Superintendent for Holy Spirit Catholic School Division and was published on October 18, 2017. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.

Last week I had the pleasure of listening to Sarah Prevette, Founder and CEO of Future Design School. She is a strong advocate for ensuring that students develop a strong creative confidence and an entrepreneurial mindset. She also speaks passionately about equipping students with the right tools to be successful in life. While assisting students to be successful in life has always been a goal in education, having creative confidence and an entrepreneurial mindset is something quite different for many of us who graduated 10 plus years ago.

But why? Why is there such a shift in education? Why does school need to be so different since, by in large, it “worked” for many of us who are now in adulthood. Adding to the confusion is that education in Canada, and even more so in Alberta, is considered one of the highest performing publicly funded systems in the world. So, if that is the case, then why are school systems continually pushing forward on school improvement?

Let's begin with a 2017 statistic from the World Economic Forum shared by Ms. Prevette: “65% of children currently entering primary school will have jobs that don't exist yet.” That statistic alone should challenge our education systems as to whether we are actually equipping our students with the right tools for that unknown workplace. What tools will be required of our students to fill those unknown jobs and be successful in life? Employers are already stating that future employees will be required to excel in entrepreneurialism, grit, resilience, mindfulness, creativity and resourcefulness. They will need people who can communicate and collaborate with and without technology, and be critical thinkers who can problem solve. Much of our older curriculum, and many current teaching practices or assessments, don't necessarily align with a focus on competencies and yet, that is what will be required now and into the future.

Literacy and numeracy have not been forgotten in this school redesign. In fact, literacy and numeracy hold a greater focus than what we previously referred to as simply reading, writing and arithmetic. Students need to be well versed in multiple literacies in order to discern fact from fiction, and the need to be numerate in our world is ever increasing. But being competent in only literacy and numeracy is not sufficient for students to see success in their lives. Students need more!

Individuals like Sarah Prevette, who vocally question and challenge the *status quo*, are essential to be able to define the why for schools, encouraging them to become more like hubs for innovation. While developing strong foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, students must also encounter opportunities to create, to experiment and to find their own passion for learning. The ability to be a learner, not simply learned, will serve students well in their future lives. Let's make sure that schools continue to transform to meet those needs.