

## Authentic Experiences for Deep Learning

*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 March 28, 2018. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.*

Last week, senior educational leaders from across the province and Alberta Education officials came together for our annual learning conference. Our senior educational team also took in the pre-conference day in order to continue our work around deep learning, featuring educational gurus, Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn, co-authors of the book *Coherence*.

Deep learning focuses on the global competencies, better known as the 6 Cs, which include: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking. It is not about programs or specific subjects, but rather targets the culture within classrooms, schools and systems. That is why the transformation to deep learning may be so difficult to understand and actualize systemically. For many of us, our lived experience of schooling knows only grades and subjects. Compliant students, passive learners and disengaged but well-behaved youth characterize our view of the schools we attended.

But deep learning asks for more. Demands more in order to prepare students for an ever changing and complex world. It requests that students be active in their own learning and requires systems to develop authentic learning experiences for all students. Authenticity comes through a connection to the student's own life and, more importantly, by enhancing social and community awareness. It may be called charity work or service learning. In the latest document released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Valuing our Teachers and Raising their Status: How Communities Can Help*, author Andreas Schleicher writes about this authentic learning by saying, "... [it] is designed to help students apply their academic content knowledge to act on authentic and often complex societal issues."

From our school division's perspective, and especially during this Holy Week, two competencies that we must always highlight in our schools are character and citizenship. For us, authentic learning takes its form through social justice projects. We link our projects directly to the social teaching of our Church and therefore connect character and citizenship to faith. The corporal works of mercy (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the prisoners, bury the dead and give alms to the poor) are central to social justice projects in our schools.

Acts of charity and service learning are well established in public schools that provide authentic learning experiences too. All schools and systems must continue to transform their practices to offer these authentic experiences to deepen learning. We, in Catholic Education, just approach our authentic learning through the lens of our faith. Our social justice approach speaks, in part, to our mission where, "our schools foster the growth of responsible citizens who will live, celebrate and proclaim their faith."