

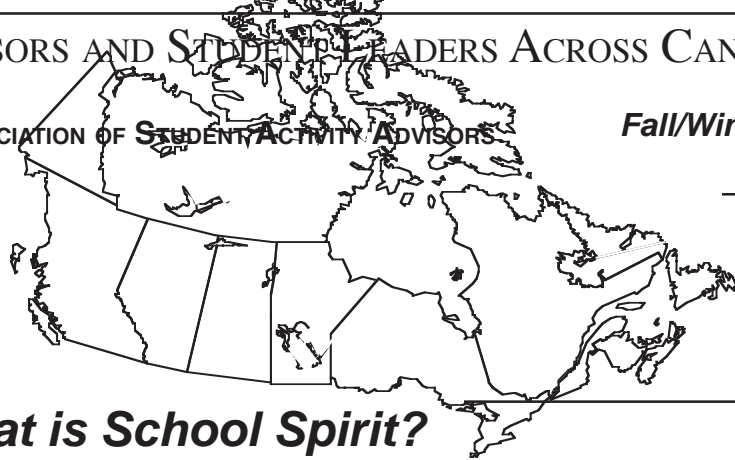
ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE NEWSLETTER FOR ADVISORS AND STUDENT LEADERS ACROSS CANADA

Vol. 3 No. 1

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT ACTIVITY ADVISORS

Fall/Winter 1999



Praise Points

Praise for Others

Take praise beyond simple generic recognition with these three steps:

1. Make a general remark, such as:
“That was a great activity, Steve.”
2. Tell him specifically what you liked: “I liked how you delegated the jobs to the new members of council.”
3. Generalize from this specific instance to a character strength:
“Your ability to involve the whole group will help us throughout the year. I admire that.”

Following this method tells a person that this specific event is indicative of something you admire about him or her. It’s much more powerful than just saying, “Good job.”

Praise for Yourself

During the present climate in education, one of the hardest things to do is to convince yourself that you are making a positive difference in the lives of your students. Keep all the thank you notes and positive letters of appreciation in the “I made a difference” file. Take this file out when you need to reinforce your belief that what you do is good for your students and your school.

What is School Spirit?

School spirit is not pompoms and pep rallies. School spirit is a simple process of connecting the dots. If each group within your school—the skaters, the music kids, the staff, the jocks—is a dot, then school spirit is the connections made between those dots. Healthy schools promote connections between the groups. Students and staff in a school with spirit feel connected.

Mark Scharenbroich

The more connections a school makes between students and staff, between students and the community, and between all of the different student groups within a school; the healthier a school will be. These connections are formed when students join clubs and teams and when they attend dances. These connections are also formed when teachers smile at kids in the hallways and joke about the result of last night’s hockey game or when students get free candy just for showing up at an activity. The more connections that are made, the less chance there is of someone feeling that they have to destroy the school building through vandalism or disrupt the people in it through physical violence.

I spoke recently to a man in his late 40’s about his recollections of high school. He said that for his first three years he didn’t really like the academic side of school that much, and that he had no interest in the social side of it as well. He saw school as an uncomfortable and awkward place for him to be. In his final year, he got sick and spent two weeks in the hospital. The student council heard of this, and even though he was not an active person at the school, they prepared a care package of candy and had the student council advisor drop it off. The advisor took a few minutes and talked to him alleviating some of the boredom that he was experiencing in that hospital bed.

This man still remembers that moment today and looks fondly on his final year as one of his best. He wasn’t an academic star; he just barely passed. He didn’t rush out and join any teams or clubs either, but he finally felt connected. When people feel connected, they walk the hallways with a lighter step. When people feel connected, they feel good about school. When people feel connected, they don’t and won’t forget.

Dave Conlon

CASAA

Advisor Notes

Creative Starter

When you want students at your next meeting to think creatively to solve a problem, watch your language. How you frame a problem can make it more difficult for others to think creatively.

Here's a one-minute exercise that highlights the difference:

- Display to your group the letters: C-S-R-I-E-X-L-E-A-T-T-E-R-E-S. Then ask "How can you cross out six letters to form a common word?"

After they attack this problem for a while, ask them to reconsider it by asking, "In what ways might you cross out six letters to form a common word?" The second question opens the door for more than one possible solution. And that stirs creativity. (Answer: Crossing out S-I-X-L-E-T-T-E-R-S leaves the word C-R-E-A-T-E.)

Suggestion: Use the "invitational" phrase *In what ways might ...* to introduce a problem-solving statement.

Mini-Team

If a student volunteers for a task, but lacks the needed skills to accomplish it successfully, don't refuse the offer or set them up for failure by letting them do it alone. Those options will hurt their morale or the possibility of them volunteering again. Instead, pair the student with someone who has the necessary skills and call the duo a "mini-team."

Human Checkers

This exercise demonstrates problem solving strategies and dealing with communication in a group.

Objectives

- to put students in situations where they must choose between personal gain and group gain
- to understand that a person's role in a group changes according to the needs of the group
- to experience the difference in perspective when one is actively involved in a project and when one is on the sidelines
- to emphasize the importance of planning

Materials

- a life-size checker board or simply put masking tape on the floor
- crowns (ones from Burger King work well)
- a way to identify teams through bandannas or team pinnies

Procedure

Students assume positions on the board just like checkers. The rules are the same as for regular checkers. One person moves at a time. When a person reaches the back row of their opponents, she is crowned. Players jump and the jumped player must go to the side, where he may help if he wishes to do so. The game ends when one team is eliminated.

Processing

After the game is finished, it is important to discuss what occurred. How did you decide what to do? Who took a leadership role? Who got sacrificed? How did it feel? Have you ever felt like this as a student leader? Those who started at the back row—what was your role and what was your focus? (Point out that the person in charge at the beginning of a project may not be the most important person later on in the project.) Who became kings? How did it feel? If your team had a plan, did you follow it? If not, why not? What alterations did you make? Was the sideline perspective different from those on the board? (Can you understand why students who are not directly involved lose interest?) What did you learn about team work from this activity? What did you learn from this activity that you can apply to your role as student leader?

Sue Cummins

This exercise is from *Leadership Lessons—Lessons to Lead By*, now available through CASAA. It contains fifty lesson plans for teaching leadership concepts and skills.

Nobody Listens to Announcements ———

Millions of dollars are spent trying to relay corporate messages, so it's no wonder that your announcements are being ignored or lost in the constant bombardment of information that we live in today. Stop trying to reach today's media savvy teens with 1960's technology. You must find new ways to get your message across.

Pop culture is very derivative today, so look at the popular advertising campaigns and slogans on TV. Students pride themselves on being able to spot the pop culture references in *Austin Powers*, so make your advertising more hip, Baby!

Toilet Tales

Post weekly events and announcements in a broadsheet format in the stalls and above the urinals. People with time to spend need something to read, and it might as well be school-related.

Event Menu

Taking a lead from restaurants and diners, place tent cards on the tables in the cafeteria containing the "event menu for the week." Specials can be highlighted as the "Activity du jour."

Club Scene

Clubs and bars advertise dances and bands with small photocopied handbills that are handed out on the street corner. Have your dances and coffee houses advertised the same way, but stand at the exit doors to your school. Use the same graphic styles and format used by dance clubs to catch attention.

Cabbage Day

Student council members walk around with a cabbage for the day. Students will ask, "Why are you carrying around that cabbage?" The council member can reply, "I'm taking it to the dance this week." It will quickly go around the school that the student council is abusing vegetables, but your dance information will have crossed everyone's lips.

You have to package your messages in as many different guises as you can think of. Think of how many ways McDonalds presents a pretty basic slab of hamburger. The more varieties of sizzle that you can provide will guarantee more messages getting across to today's audience. Also, you must realize that once you have run a successful advertising campaign, you must create a different one to advertise your next event. Remember, once you've caught their attention one way, you won't be able to do it the same way again.

Activity Promotion

The Podge Door

Over the fall Jacob Hespeler Secondary School has become the focus of lots of good news items and have consequently been receiving a lot of positive press. We have copied all of the articles (our new Canon copier produces a better copy than the original from the newspaper) and have begun podging them on the tuck shop door to make a collage. One door is full and we still have plenty more to go. We will continue to podge. It has been recommended that we now cover the podge with a urethane to really seal the collage. It is amazing to see the kids and visitors to the school reading the door. If your school doesn't like the idea of this happening to the doors, take sheets of masonite and make some podge plaques that can be hung in different places or put up at events such as Parent Night or Education Week.

*Cathy Vollmer Ashley
Cambridge, Ontario*

Media Personalities

It is difficult to get the media to cover school events and activities, unless you make them part of them. If you want coverage of a sports event, invite a local sports reporter to a half-time challenge. Give him or her a school spirit shirt for participating. Chances are that they will wear it and advertise your event. It is easy to report on something that you are involved in, and this will improve your school's relationship with the media.

Events for Fun

The 98% Monty

With a leering eye on “The Full Monty”, our students ran a clothing drive and asked students and teachers to empty their closets and drawers of all the clothing that was no longer being worn or no longer in style. Clothing was accumulated by homeroom, and then on the final day, students from each participating homeroom dressed in as much of that clothing as they could possibly wear and waddled down to the cafeteria during lunch. A stage was set in front of the crowd and the appropriate soundtrack music from the movie was played — yes, I know it’s peeling music. The overdressed participants disrobed to the acceptable 2%, and the pile of clothing on the floor was huge!

We planned a used clothing sale, but it was easier in the end to have the Salvation Army pick up the donated clothing. They were happy, we had fun and nobody got sent home for being too revealing.

Glenview Park S.S.

Time Capsule for Grads

The wood shop at Sackville High builds a time capsule box suitably inscribed with the class year, and the box sits in the main foyer for a few weeks prior to graduation day. The box is then sealed and tucked away until the ten year reunion of the class held at the school. This is a tradition that is lots of fun for the class during their last month at school and certainly fun filled nostalgia ten years later.

Tam Fawcett

Learning by Doing

Good teaching often involves lessons learned that often were not anticipated or intended. It is always the student who decides whether the lesson contained something that was useful or provided something that made sense. These individual responses will happen regardless of how many times a lesson has been taught and refined to its best advantage by the teacher. Leadership classes which teach through experience enhance the chances of this happening.

One of the activities undertaken by my leadership class is called *Stars of the School*. Stars are cut out of yellow construction paper and each student and staff member’s name is printed neatly on a single star. The stars are then put up in the main hallway of the school under a banner that indicates that these are the “Stars of Our School.” (The cutout shape can be changed to other theme days, and we have done hearts for Valentine’s and leaves for the family tree of the school. Elementary schools often have master cutout blocks for this type of activity.)

A few years ago, I assigned the job of running this star-maker activity to Paul, who was not the strongest member of my leadership class. He admitted to taking this class because it was the only one that fit his timetable, but Paul reluctantly enjoyed what was happening in the class with the more active members. His job was to explain the activity and make sure that there was enough paper, tape and scissors to do the job properly.

The event was successful and I complimented Paul on his work and he said that it was really a special event for him. I agreed that he indeed did a good job, but he indicated that the activity was more than that. He said, “You know what, sir? That’s the first time anyone has listened to me. That’s what was special.”

It would be wonderful to report that Paul went on to do magnificent things at our school and is now the chairman of a major international corporation. However, this was not a fairytale or a motivational speaker’s moment. Paul did what he could, enjoyed his final year at school and the last time I saw him after graduation he was filling grocery bags at the local supermarket.

There is nothing wrong with good lesson planning, but it is still true that some good lessons are not always planned for. Keep providing those leadership opportunities for your students and they will benefit in ways that you have not foreseen.

Dave Conlon

Lego Time Management

This demonstration requires three different types of Lego blocks. The first are the large Duplo blocks that toddlers use. The second type are the regular blocks that have 4–8 studs on top and the final type are the single or double stud pieces. The key to this demonstration is that your audience does not see what you are going to add next.

- Take a large wide-mouthed jar and place as many of the Duplo blocks in it as you can. Then ask your audience whether the jar is full. They will invariably answer, “Yes.”
- Now take the regular Lego pieces and add them to the jar, shaking the jar so the pieces fit between the larger Duplo. Ask again whether the jar is full. The answer will be in the area of “Probably.”
- Take the smallest pieces of Lego and add them to the original jar. Once more, ask whether the jar is full. Your answer will probably be “No.”
- Finally, add water from a pitcher to the jar until it is filled to the brim. Now, ask your audience what the point of the demonstration is.

Most people in the audience will say that this demonstrates that no matter how full your schedule is, you can always fit something else into it. This is very true, but a better point is that if you don't put the large Duplo pieces in first, you will never get them in at all. Ask your audience what do they consider to be the big pieces in their lives. If they don't make them a priority, they will never get to them. Also, when putting in some of the smaller pieces they may fall out—some of the minor things in your schedule don't matter if they're not included because you've taken care of the major priorities.

One of the unique design aspects of Lego is that *all* of the pieces fit together. As a final demonstration, pour all of the pieces out of the jar and ask how a person would build a schedule or a timetable out of these pieces (remember to drain the water first!). The Duplo pieces look too large to accommodate the smaller Lego, but all of the pieces will fit together to form a single unit. Point out that each person in the room would build a different structure from the same pieces, but that is why once you learn the tricks of time management, you will still structure your busy life and the events in it differently from the next active person. There are also structures that are prone to topple over from poor construction. The same can be said for some people's schedules.

Summarize the demonstration by stressing that busy people need pattern and structure to their schedules. However, we should always check that we aren't filling our lives with the smaller things that don't really matter

Rumours

Bad news and rumours travel faster through a school than any memo or announcement system. The only information that travels faster is the news that school is being closed early for the day. Because of today's climate and recent incidents in schools in the US and Canada, it is important to come up with a way of dealing with rumours and bad news information that can quickly get out of hand if not dealt with immediately and effectively.

Deal with bad news through the clique leaders of the school. Each clique within your school has an identifiable person who was not elected, but who still functions as the *de facto* leader of that group. Form a group consisting of these leaders that will meet on an ad hoc basis. Call it the Communication Club. The best teacher/advisor for this group is a counsellor who is not directly part of the school's administration. When an event happens that needs to be dealt with, this group meets and is given the facts as they are known. There must never be an attempt to manipulate the information for this group or put a “spin” on the situation. The right information given to the right people will diffuse any situation that is fuelled by rumour and misinformation.

This group does not need regular meetings. When they are brought together, there will be the opportunity to deal with some of their concerns and questions. Dealing with these problems in this setting will help to avoid problems that could occur in the future.

Morale Check

Listening to the pronouns students and staff use when they describe your school and administration can speak volumes about commitment and morale.

Examples:

- “They” and “them.” If you hear mostly these two, you probably have some morale boosting to do.
- “We” and “us.” These are the words you want to hear. They mean students are proud to be part of the school community.

An activity that can boost morale is the *Class of the Day Contest*.

At the end of first or second semester, teachers are invited to nominate a class for their hard work and dedication. Teachers write up a brief blurb on why this class deserves to be *Class of the Day*. All nominations are placed in a draw, and for the 4 days prior to the end of term class winners are randomly drawn daily. The winning class receives hot chocolate and donuts for everyone in the winter term or ice cream in June.

After the class winners have been drawn, all the nomination sheets are posted in the main hallway of the school. Staff, students and visitors will read the nominations and learn about all of the great learning that is going on in your school. Also, the winning classes have some necessary donut therapy that makes the final days of a semester all the more bearable. This event is a great morale boost for staff and students.

Novel Hook for Pride

Reinventing or revisiting ideas often make an idea seem new when, in fact, variations of the idea are everywhere. The key to fundraising or charity drives is to do something *novel*, to tie it into something your students will feel *pride* in, and to have some *hook* that the school can witness collectively.

Like many schools, we run an Easter Food Drive at Galt Collegiate for our local Cambridge Food Bank. At this time of year students are feeling quite overwhelmed by the number of “drives” in which they have been involved, so we needed an idea that would stimulate the type of participation needed to make this activity work.

The first key ingredient was *novelty*. Our student council had set a goal in our minds of collecting one ton of food. This on its own approaches novelty, but we needed something more — *pride*. Our school senior boys basketball team had recently won a league championship. So, instead of collecting a ton of food, we had a “weigh-in” in the cafeteria of each member of the team. This addressed a couple of key elements. First, it provided each team member a moment to be recognized by our student body. Second, the collective weight of the team became our goal for the food drive (2,279 pounds). Finally, comes the *hook*. The challenge to the school was to collect enough food to match or surpass the weight of the team. If this happened, the boys basketball team would collectively do **ONE PUSH-UP FOR EACH POUND OF FOOD COLLECTED**, in the cafeteria for everyone to witness. Not only have the boys been recognized for their championship, but they have shown a wonderful community minded spirit.

Spin-off Event

For each pound of food collected in a homeroom, the homeroom will gain 10 points as part of our semester long homeroom competition, with the winning homeroom getting passes to Canada’s Wonderland.

Outcome

While it is wonderful if the target for the drive is met, this is still not the ultimate goal for the activity. What is most important is that awareness of both the team and the food drive has been raised and with that a wonderful community spirit within our school. All of this happens when you attempt to consider the *pride* students can feel from their efforts and involvement in school and community activities.

Mark Hunniford

Nothing “Extra” About Activities

Words are very important because they label, classify and identify things for us. The feminist movement has long attempted to bring more nonsexist language into usage because of the fact that words confer power and male-gender words were used in the powerful positions such as chairman. The following excerpt asks that you give more power to the words that you use to describe the activities that happen at your school:

The concept of “extracurricular” serves no useful purpose. Anything extra occupies a position peripheral to the school’s main mission. We propose to scrap this outmoded term and instead call these activities “cocurricular,” emphasizing that they are integral to the educational program. A high school properly provides for social and personal needs, as well as for those that are strictly academic. Given the benefits that students can obtain, high schools should promote cocurricular activities for all students. Cocurricular pursuits, after all, can undergird the goal of teaching students to be responsible and fulfilled human beings, providing them with opportunities that develop character, critical thinking, sociability, and specific skills.

It is not unreasonable, in order to justify school-sponsored activities, to hold professional educators responsible for making sure that connections to learning exist. An athletic coach who endorses a win-at-any-cost philosophy, for instance, has no business overseeing a cocurricular activity in a high school. Essentially, all activities carried out under the aegis of a high school should be viewed in terms of their potential contribution to the school’s overall goals for young people. This imperative applies to athletics and clubs as much as it does to student government and publications. A high school should seek to engage as many students as possible in cocurricular activities, following a philosophy that students will miss a valuable part of their education if they do not participate. The cocurricular program, therefore, should offer sufficient variety to appeal to a wide range of student interests.

Those connected with the activities, both students and their adult sponsors, must understand how each activity fulfills the larger purposes of the high school. Evidence from a U.S. Department of Education study shows that participants in cocurricular activities have more consistent attendance, better academic achievement, and higher aspirations than non-participants. In addition, another study shows that students who devote 5-19 hours a week to cocurricular pursuits are less likely to use drugs or drop out of school.

Excerpted from *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (NASSP, 1996)

CASAA Listserv

Snowball fight

This spirit activity is just like a real snowball fight. Hold it in the gym, and instead of snow use socks that are curled up into a ball. Tables turned on their sides and big boxes on the gym floor can act as protectors and to hide from getting hit. Two teams participate and if a person is hit by a snowball they are out of the game. The last team with players that haven’t been hit wins. This is an activity that even the teachers like to get involved with.

Carly Grimard
grim@kamloops.net

Senior Christmas Dinner

We invite the six local Senior’s homes and provide a complete turkey dinner. Each senior is matched with a student and there is a meal that the students must serve the senior. The choir sings and teachers bring their preschool aged children in to see Santa and gifts are exchanged.

Our administration wear tuxedos and the seniors are picked up by school bus (even those in wheelchairs). All the food, buses and extras are donated or sponsored. This is an important tradition in our school. The same people have been coming every year and the senior homes wait for our call.

John Thompson
thompson48@golden.net

The CASAA listserv is a mailing list of great ideas that you can join if you have e-mail. Check out the CASAA website for more information on how to join.

Quotes

I cannot give you a formula for success, but here's the formula for failure: Try to please everybody.

Benjamin Franklin

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

Albert Einstein

Everyone looks at the world from the bell tower of his own village.

Russian proverb

The illiterate of the future will not be the person who cannot read. It will be the person who does not know how to learn.

Alvin Toffler

One ought never to turn one's back on a threatened danger and try to run from it. If you do that, you will double the danger. But if you meet it promptly and without flinching, you will reduce it by half. Never run away from anything. Never.

Winston Churchill

After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

Nelson Mandela

Healthy Activity Programs

The following paragraph is taken from a NASSP bulletin addressed to secondary school principals:

It is important to realize that a Student Activity Program affords many students a level of involvement in school that a strictly academic program would not make possible. Students involved in activity programs often experience a heightened interest in academic courses; have a platform to practice leadership and followership skills; have an opportunity to socialize with students and interact with teachers in a setting other than the classroom; are given a healthy use of their leisure time. Schools benefit from the open communications between students and faculty; the building of school spirit and student morale; and encouraging students' development of social skills and an awareness and appreciation of other ethnic groups and their values.

The above information is not new to anyone involved in running an activity program at a secondary school. However, it summarizes what many of us know to be true about a healthy activity program. It is also important to look beyond your school and realize what is happening in other successful programs.

Things to realize about healthy activity programs:

Large schools (enrolment of more than 900) have anywhere from 30 to 50 different activities while small schools typically have fewer than 30 different activities for students. The real difference is that smaller schools typically have a higher involvement rate than larger schools.

Students vote with their feet. If they are not coming to activities, perhaps it is time to change the activity. Everything has a life cycle, so admit that the event has had its moment of glory and move on.

The most important thing an advisor to an activity can receive is TIME.

The administration understands that activities give students the opportunity to learn by *doing*. This includes failures as well as successes.

Newsletter Published by:

Dave Conlon
Publication Director for CASAA
Glenview Park Secondary School
55 McKay St.
Cambridge, ON N1R 4G6
fax: 519-621-5860
email: casaa@sentex.net

You have received a copy of this newsletter because of CASAA's commitment to providing resources and information to teachers and students across Canada. Please pass this information on to other advisors who would benefit from it.