

Promoting Kindness through Meaningful Connections and Creativity

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June 30, 2018

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During this project, photos and videos were taken of the entire process from start to the very end. Please visit the following link to view the blog that tracks and outlines the research project.

<https://promotingkindnessthroughcreativityandmeaningfulconnections.wordpress.com/>

Students and I created a video to share during our kindness celebration with our class and families. We shared it with other classes, our parents, and put it on the school hallway TV for everyone to learn more about our action projects. It can be viewed using the following link on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AAvvyWKNVw&feature=youtu.be>

## Successes

My applied action research project was a success in many ways. The four goals of creating a culture of kindness, using interest-based learning, intentionally practicing kindness and building new connections with others were met to the fullest. The project objectives were also met the best of our abilities. I worked to conduct environmental scans, connected with experts and guides for our research, increased natural occurrences of kindness, created change agents within the school and promoted interest-based learning through a focus of creativity.

Feedback from colleagues, parents and students all speaks to the positive success of the project. My class observations and the ripple effects we saw on Conscious Kindness Day are testaments to the growth and change in the participants. Another month of school, would have only increased the success of this project. An earlier start on kindness education is a must next year.

The largest strength of this project is that it was completely student driven. I created the idea and laid the groundwork but the learning was students directed. I couldn't be happier with how the project came together and the action projects that were created. Young students are very capable of steering their own learning and creating meaningful collaborations with others.

The main challenge of this project was the reliance on young people to carry a vision of kindness forward with little experience of how to lead. I soon discovered that this project was just as much about creating leader and change agents as it was about creativity and kindness. When students become passionate about something, no matter the age, they are capable of leading a change. The change may be small but so are they and this is the place that their education begins and where they begin to create and build 21<sup>st</sup> century learner skills.

## Goals & Objectives

I set out on this applied action project to establish a culture of kindness. This was successfully met within my classroom. Students use a language of kindness and can each independently articulate kindness when they see it and when it is necessary. Other teachers in the building have shared instances where they have been impressed with my students' kind actions. My students planned and celebrated Conscious Kindness Day on May 16<sup>th</sup> and that was really the turning point where we began changing the culture outside of our classroom. For the week leading up, my students made announcements asking for donations to a local food bank be dropped off on Conscious Kindness Day. My students came to school early to provide coffee for the staff and to hand out cookies to all students as they arrived for the day. My students made sure to greet each person with a hello and wish for a good day. Before school began, students attached stickies to each classroom door in the building with positive phrases and encouragement to be kind. The feedback we received from students, parents and staff was very positive. The middle years students were so inspired with the day that they chose to continue the kind stickies trend we started and created one for each and every student in grade 7-8 and attached it to their lockers. Staff members participated too by bringing in homemade treats for their colleagues to enjoy.

After Conscious Kindness Day, the goal was to create interest-based action projects to promote kindness in our school, homes and community. As students began their kindness action projects we began reaching out to others in the building. Many of our interest-based projects involved the collection of an item to help less fortunate people and animals. A large amount of students also chose to share a passion of theirs with others through a lesson or teaching opportunity (ie. Soccer school). The students created and implemented the projects while I guided the process along. The intention of the action projects was to allow the students to be creative and use their interests to guide their learning. We hoped that our projects would inspire others to complete their own kindness acts unprovoked.

Thirdly, an outcome of this project was to build a focus of concern for others and the community. Students certainly showed growth in this area and would often vocalize where they saw a need for kindness or noticed a kind act but it's an area that could use more work. It seems as though while they are concerned for others and the community it is more often in a disciplinary way. The students see a lack of kindness in areas and immediately need to share it within our class. I hope this becomes an opportunity for them to act kindly instead of police kindness. This project set out to build connections between my students both new ones and strengthen old ones. I had hoped that more of the projects would be farther reaching outside of our building. I was hoping we would target groups or people that might require kindness some days more than others. But I did not want to sway their projects, and wanted to only guide them to what they thought would be most fulfilling. Even though most projects concentrated around our school there were still projects that reached out to the local animal shelter,

homeless shelter, the zoo and Winnipeg's Children's Hospital. They chose to create kindness projects that affected people in our school for the most part. This is telling of how little we are connected to the community. This is certainly a place for growth in the future. Lastly, I believe that students were seeking some quick or instant gratification which is more attainable when you are already in the environment necessary.

The last goal of this project was to intentionally have my students practice kindness. This was met very successfully. We began practicing self-kindness and looking at the importance of this for several reasons. We met with a child psychologist to learn about how kindness affects our brains, we recorded our self-kindness journey through a happy journal. Keith Macpherson, a mindfulness coach and motivational speaker met with my students to look at different ways they can practice kindness to others and themselves. We video conferences with another school to learn about their kindness activities and even met with a United Way representative to learn more about what role we could play in Conscious Kindness Day. After we practiced self-kindness we moved on to social kindness and focused on special kindness acts within our classroom, then the school and then the earth. It included all kinds of activities led by the students including planting wild flowers for the bees, writing letters to ourselves and teachers, helping at home and showing kindness to elders through our senior's home buddy program.

This action project had 5 broad objectives it aimed to accomplish. The first was to conduct an environmental scan of HS Paul School and other public venues. We completed an environmental scan of our school. Students observed in hallways and we were also fortunate enough that we all were able to sit in different classrooms and observe. Students were very critical which was excellent. We shared the successes we saw and together created a list of kind options that were available for the items that were not overly positive. We were unable to purposely branch out to a larger public area to do a formal scan but made sure to look for kindness in our other activities such as field trips, visits to the seniors home and students shared their experiences and observations when out with their families.

A large objective of this research project was to connect with experts to guide our learning and gain design, ideas and insights from for our kindness action projects. We successfully met this. We were able to first hand interview and learn from a child psychologist, a classroom of grade 5/6 students from another school that have been leading a year-long kindness campaign, United Way regarding Conscious Kindness day in Canada and with Keith Macpherson which I think was really the most impactful for my students. The research project was also looking to see if by incorporating kindness learning and opportunities to kindness ambassadors within the school if there would be an increase in natural occurrences of kind acts in the school. Through conversation with colleagues that also teach my students, music teacher, phys-ed and student services. They agree with me that my students do show more natural occurrences of kindness than other classes. They will most often point out their accomplishments but none the less are more outgoing than others. Conscious Kindness day

gave me hope that the culture is shifting to embrace more kindness. Next year, I would like to do a similar project earlier in the year to have more time for all students to naturally engage in the idea of kindness and for more culture building activities.

Fourthly, I was hoping to create agents of change within the school. While I see that this has occurred within my classroom it has been very sparse beyond that. Students are strong in their feelings about kindness within our safe group of classmates but struggle to have a voice when with others, especially that are older. For example: A group of students planned their kindness to the earth to be a clean-up. They had it all sorted out; locations everyone would clean up, why it was important, posters they wanted to put up. Then when we met with grade 5/6s they had little to say and our cleanup ended up being like all the other clean ups completed at school. Perhaps a project with social aspects would be better suited to the fall so that students have a longer time to build up their confidence in their cause and can better lead. Or it may have to do with their age, being the youngest in the school and still learning to lead.

Lastly, and perhaps the most difficult, this project aimed to promote interest-based learning and a creativity focus in HS Paul School. This was accomplished in my classroom and I saw the benefits of interest-based learning first hand. Students were given freedom to be creative and even encouraged to be. A small handful of educators have shown interest in my project and have perused my blog but with it being the end of the school year, I haven't received any requests to learn more or for collaboration next year. I plan to more formally share my project in the fall to fresh eyes and ears that ready for the year and looking for new perspectives.

## Impact

My project had a very positive impact on the students in my classroom. Students can articulate reasons for kindness, what it looks, sounds and feels like and are able to share and act on ways to promote it. This importance of kindness in their lives has stemmed beyond the four walls of our classrooms into their homes. The following is an email I received from a parent:

*"I want to let you know how much your kindness project has impacted Owen. This week Owen has written the sweetest little messages to each of us and has taped the notes onto our bedroom doors. He continues to add new messages to these notes every day. I get a heart-warming feeling every time I pass by these notes. Last night while laying down for bed he said that he has been doing acts of kindness for his class but that he hadn't done anything for his family. That is what prompted him to write us these notes. He then started brainstorming different ideas to continue his acts of kindness. This kindness project has really resonated with him and has been an impactful experience for him. I want to thank you for being such an incredible role model for him.*

*~ Laura (Parent)*

After de-briefing the project with my students, some of their comments were:

*"When you are kind, everyone is happy. You are happy because you are being kind and they are happy because you are being kind to them"*

*"We get kinder every day because last year we didn't do this so we are smarter and kinder now"*

*"We have learned a lot of ways to be kind and every day we try new ones"*

*"We got to be the leaders in our kindness projects"*

This genuine spirit of kindness is instilled in my students even when they are not in my presence as Laura the parent shared but I have also had other teachers comment on the kindness of my students. Our music teacher often comments on the small kindnesses they share around her and says that *"After I teach them I feel uplifted and they make me have a better day"* and a substitute teacher in my classroom left me a note debriefing the day and wrote *"your class is very busy but also very kind, I enjoyed my morning here very much."*

The impact this project has had on me is one of pride. While I orchestrated the project, the student's kindness activities and action projects were created by them. They did the hard work and I was able to facilitate their learning. Using interest-based learning with a focus on creativity students became the leaders and that was the most impacting for me. My job became so much more important and students did all the work while being engaged and genuinely motivated to make a change.



### Personal Take-Aways

Looking back at this project, I only feel pride and accomplishment. Observing my students and listening to the rapport that was developed in our classroom surrounding kindness makes it evident that this type of learning needs to continue. Interest-based learning needs to be at the forefront of my teaching always. I had students asking me when they would get to work on their kindness project. This is a rare phenomenon, asking for choice time-yes, but asking to work on a project- that was new to me. I did not look up a curriculum document to see what outcomes we needed to meet but instead tracked all of the skills my students were building. Creativity in the choice of their action project based on personal strengths and passions. Critical thinking about who their project should affect, why, how they should implement their project, when and much more. They had to collaborate and communicate with others for their projects to be successful. Character may have been the largest accomplishment of this project. Each student is genuinely more aware of kindness and their role as an ambassador.

I learned more about front loading information and the drawbacks to too much of it. that too much frontloading can build boredom of a subject. The pace needs to be quick enough to spark curiosity the entire time. I have always believed repetition is important but this project showed me that students want and need the opportunity to steer the learning quickly if not immediately. I also observed a lack of community connection with our school, I hope to change that. Students struggle to see beyond the walls of the classroom as opportunities for learning. When creating their interest projects, they felt only comfortable connecting with people in the school and their families, I would like to see a confidence with the community to build and create new connections. Also, the timing of a project such as one focused on kindness would be more beneficial at the beginning of a school year. These are all certainly next steps for my teaching.

## Challenges

A challenge to this project was time management and making sure that all components took place in a meaningful way and at an appropriate pace. In the early stages of the project, where my focus was on front loading my students with the information they would need, I felt at times this was going too slow. It was a difficult balance of going slowly enough for my students to understand everything and quickly enough to not lose their interest. Beyond that concern, everything happened on time and projects wrapped up in perfect timing to finish the year and celebrate our accomplishments. Another challenge of this project was the fact that it was relying on others interacting with my class to provide an authentic learning experience. This was beyond successful; all the hoped-for experts came to my classroom and shared varied experiences and ideas with my students. When the action projects came about and we began looking for donations and participants for our activities, we felt an overwhelming feeling of support. We got over full boxes of donations for the 4 projects requiring and sign-up sheets for students teaching opportunities were over filled with waiting lists.

Perhaps the largest challenge throughout this project is influencing colleagues to build a capacity for interest-based learning in their classrooms. Throughout the process I have felt genuine interest in what my students were doing and many have asked to know more. Staff has also offered to have their classes support my students in any way needed and they have been very helpful for donations and available to listen as we share our learning. Using my project blog and class video, colleagues of mine (the few expected ones) looked over my blog, watched the student video and offered me some feedback. I was hoping to reach more staff in the building but it was the expected staff that share many of the same values in education as me. At first, I was disappointed but then realized these are the people that will jump on board. Small steps are what is needed. Next year it won't be just me but a few of us focusing on interest-based learning and creativity. Then maybe the next year that number will double. I also see September as a better time to try again to share my project with colleagues. In June everyone is tired and needs a break, in September we are re-energized and ready to try something new.

The last challenge I anticipated and encountered was the fact that this project depended on the youngest students in the school to lead change and encourage a culture shift. There have been both successes and frustration in this area. The students have become leaders of change within our classroom and in their families encouraging a kinder culture and community. Even with younger students they can share the importance of kindness but when it comes to sharing with older students they become very timid and the confidence for their project wavers. Conscious Kindness day was a huge confidence boost. The feedback we received gave students the boost needed to accomplish their final projects. Through their action plans, they practiced their capacity to lead. Since the projects were based on their interests, it created a better forum for dialogue since they felt confidence in their passions to

share. If there was another month of school, I do believe that our school culture would have changed more and my students would have become even more comfortable being kindness ambassadors.

## Results & Knowledge Gained

Most importantly, my students are kinder. They actively seek out opportunities to share and articulate kind acts. Adults both in the building and outside comment about the kind language and actions of my students. Students were able to take their learning about kindness and turn it into an action project that was fueled by their interests and ideas. Through these projects, unintentionally my students learned the skills needed to become a leader.

I have gained just as many skills and knowledge through this project as my students did. I am a more confident teacher because of this project. I can fully move away from the traditional methods of teaching and fully immerse myself in a more progressive and transformative style. I had been holding back, ensuring I was not holding anything back from my students but the project has confirmed to me that interest-based learning and a focus on skill attainment is the best education possible for today's learner.

## Sustainability

I like to believe that my project is sustainable in many ways. I hope that as my students move from my classroom to another that they remain kinder and work to lead kindness in their classroom as they did in mine. I hope that the skills they have developed continue to be built upon and strengthened. Unfortunately, I worry about their education as they move forward because many educators both in and out of my building do not share the same teaching and learning priorities I do. This is a deficit for many learners. I hope that my project can aid in supporting others to reevaluate their priorities.

This is a project that could be replicated every year and multiple times through a year. Interest based learning fits each and every school subject and creativity needs to be the forefront of our teaching priorities. This project was just beginning to really influence the rest of the building, so I hope that through collaboration with others it can continue next year.

I hope by sharing my project and especially my blog with other educators they become influenced to complete this project with their students. It is all laid out and easy to follow, I hope it can be useful in sparking some similar projects.

## Leading Change

I have learned how secular my school is. You go about your day leading your students in your classroom and don't really think a whole lot about the other classrooms and their teaching and learning. This project made me much more aware of the little connectivity we have through our building. The visibility with which I led my project had people asking questions and my students were actively learning throughout the building to lead change. It's important that we see more students conducting their learning, sharing and collaborating with others in their schools. There are students in all different classrooms and grades that can offer each support or share the same interest. We need to foster more opportunities for students to lead change cross over grade level barriers to foster better opportunities for learning and collaboration.

For the professional teaching staff, I would also like to see an opportunity to share what their class is learning about and what skills they are focusing on. This would create an opportunity for us to support each other, see where collaborations could occur and get our innovative ideas out there to inspire others. We too easily as educators downplay the active learning in our classrooms. We need to celebrate our selves just as we do our students. A little more collegial happiness would go a long way in changing the culture of education in a building.

## Next Steps

My next learning goals will continue to focus around leading change. Learning more about the how-tos of inspiring other educators. What type of language to use, ideas for sparking curiosity in those that are seemingly uninterested. I would like to research more about the finer details when leading learning sessions and creating collaborative learning experiences. Looking at the length of meetings and sessions, the amount of people involved, and even ages to see what others have already figured out to support my leadership goals in working with a school.

Another next step, will be looking at ways to better connect the community with my classroom. I would like to find genuine ways to connect with others for more than just providing an expert lens to the class but in an authentic relationship. The type of relationships that Dr. Brent Kay shared about his experiences with the community of his former schools.

I also plan to do more sharing. This project is just one of many meaningful and progressive types of opportunities I want to provide for my students. I am always looking to others for innovative ideas and it is time that I also give back to others and share my ideas. I already know it will make my teaching stronger through reflection and collaboration with others, but it often falls by the wayside. Perhaps I will begin a professional learning network next year with educators from all different grades interested in innovative teaching and learning strategies to continue my professional development and create new collaborations.

Project Proposal:

Promoting Kindness Through Creativity and Meaningful Connections

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### **Project Idea**

This project proposes to, with a focus on nurturing kindness, inquire into how classrooms might promote creativity, explore passions and support students in creating connections? This project will be focused on grade one and two students, building their creative capacity to design, carry out and reflect on their own interest based action/change projects. Part one of the project will have students exploring the concept of self-kindness. Students will be introduced to the idea of personal bucket filling (Rath, 2009), self-empathy and compassion and build strategies for self-kindness and happiness. A psychologist with experience in self-kindness and increasing personal happiness will support the inquiry through this introduction. Part 2 of the project will have students exploring kindness in the word around them. Discussions and observations will be used to learn about where kindness is needed, who is in need, how it should be shared, how to promote it and the importance of it. The final stage will support students in taking their learning and creating an action plan targeted at increasing kindness. Students will be encouraged and supported to use creativity and innovation in the planning of their action project. The findings will be used to inform practice and share with colleagues in preparation for curriculum planning.

Through my research into kindness education, I found the Kind Campus program, that supports the outline I have created for this project. “The goal of Kind Campus is to educate entire school communities (students, families, faculty, and staff) about the positive impacts of kindness and empower them to cultivate a culture of kindness in their schools and beyond” (Kaplan et al., 2016). In the same way as this project has been designed, Kind Campus begins with self kindness, then moves to social kindness and finally kindness in action.

Education is at a pivotal time in transitioning from the traditional to the transformative. Schools have been preparing their students for a work force that no longer exists. Education needs to shift to a more progressive style of teaching and learning where students are gaining a 21<sup>st</sup> century education focused on skill attainment and interest- based learning. At the same time, the theme of kindness is globally presenting as a skill in need with the possibility of positive implications. Children are constantly inundated through the news and social media with demonstrations of anti-social, violent and destructive behaviour. Interest-based learning, creativity and kindness create a relationship for exploration that is both meaningful and exciting for students.

### **Background/Needs**

Previously, education was a system that was built to resemble a factory. Every student exited the system as a product, ready for the work force. Education was focused on content memorization and skills that related to a profession after completion of the twelve grades. The transformation schools are undertaking is seeing education move away from the concept of creating a product of the student. A child’s learning has been viewed as a product as well; they are able to answer questions and share content-related information. Students are then

assessed on the outcomes completed. Education is beginning to move away from a content model to a skill attainment model such as that of Deeper Learning by Michael Fullan. “Deep Learning, in the way we will describe it, develops the learning, creating and doing dispositions that young people need to thrive now and in their futures” (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Deep learning is meaningful, purposeful and authentic, “deep learning is more natural to the human condition because it more clearly connects with our core motivations: to directly and deeply engage in learning; to do things that truly make a difference to our lives and to the world (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). The focus of education is moving to a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as Fullan describes in his *New Pedagogies for Deeper Learning* (2014) such as creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, communication, character and citizenship. While this project will meet all areas of Fullan’s learning model, the focus is on creativity. Creativity “develops the kind of skills that young people will need in a rapidly changing and uncertain world and it can improve their self-esteem, motivation and achievement” (Grainger & Barnes, 2006). This project is focusing on the skill of creativity in young learners. Schools have been actively teaching the creativity out of students without even realizing it. Assessment and curriculum outcomes have made the promotion of creativity more and more challenging. The promotion of creativity and thinking outside of the box is integral in educating students for the future. Creativity may seem like a simple, small concept to integrate but according to Ken Robinson, creativity is “a process, not a single event, and genuine creative processes involve critical thinking as well as imaginative insights and fresh ideas [...] creativity is a disciplined process that requires skill, knowledge and control” (Azzam, 2009). Instead of viewing creativity as a skill only some have and that creativity is used only to create a product. Creativity should be viewed as “a key, cross curricula thinking skill, which has implications for our future society” (Michalopoulou, 2014).

The early years of education supports learners in developing their interests, passions and discovering the paths of learning that motivate and engage them. Combining creativity and interest based learning is an ideal relationship because “Creativity involves children initiating their own learning and making choices and decisions” (Michalopoulou, 2014). This is an exciting period in education because children know no barriers, believe in the unbelievable and are still able to dream so big that they fully believe they can make a change and a difference. “Contemporary psychologists—including Paul Silvia and Judith Harackiewicz—have found that interest is characterized by deep processing of information, effective learning strategies, academic and professional career choices and achievement, positive emotions and a sense of being energized and invigorated” (Kaufman 2014). Action or change-maker projects are not just for experienced learners but perfectly fit the needs of an early learner. “The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action” (Binfet, 2015). A classroom that supports children to follow their interests and act on their plans is one that will create innovative future leaders. Interest-based learning does require a teacher to adapt their role to a facilitator and guide, working to support the learner in their goals. “Creative teachers tend to place the learners above the curriculum and combine a positive

disposition towards creativity and person-centered teaching which actively promotes pupils who learn and think for themselves” (Grainger & Barnes, 2006).

Interest-based learning creates more than an academically strong student but supports a student in developing social emotional skills. “Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity, when they participate in a variety of rich and meaningful inquiry-based experiences, persevere and experience the satisfaction of achievement, persist even when they find a task difficult” (Michalopoulou, 2014). Interest based learning motivates a student to problem solve and navigate through their learning purposefully when they are interested in their learning and can take ownership over their goals. Interest -based learning influences everything a student does, “when you find things you are good at, you tend to get better at everything because your confidence in up and your attitude is different” (Azzam, 2009).

The model known as, Responsive Classroom, works under the premise that we should never assume anything about our student’s knowledge but instead teach everything, even the soft skills. Therefore, it is important to assume our children do not know how to show kindness and therefore teach them how. Schachter (2011) wondered if kindness can be taught. His findings saw that kindness “projects get the children thinking about other people, noticing those in need, and asking “what can we do?” (p. ). This equaled a heightened sense of others. When children become engaged in their play or learning they do not observe their surroundings the way an adult does. Teaching kindness gives students another lens to view their peers, family and community through. “Kindness, tolerance, and empathy are qualities that children develop over time through observation and practice. To teach kindness, you must first help children understand that they are capable of being kind and tolerant, and how they treat other people matters greatly” (Moore, 2004).

There is a distinct difference in how adults and children perceive kindness. Adults immediately share kindness by giving back and most often there is a transaction through donations or offering something with a monetary amount. Children view kindness as “offering physical help (e.g. helping up a student who has fallen), providing emotional help (e.g. comforting a lonely student), including others (e.g. inviting a student to join an established team), and sharing” (Binfet, 2015). This project will educate and encourage students to nurture kindness in all aspect of their lives. This project could be viewed as a type of positive psychology intervention which will target “well-being skills- skills that reduce negative affect, increase life satisfaction, and foster learning and creative thinking” (Binfet, 2015).

This project aims to not only support the students involved in the study but also begin to foster a change in the climate outside of the classroom. It is hoped that kindness will transfer from the students in my classroom to their friends in other rooms, our buddies, classes we make connections with and throughout the building to influence a larger systemic change. “School climate, defined as the quality and character of school life, is also known to have a

measurable impact on the academic success and wellbeing of students. Past research has demonstrated that positive school climate is associated with positive emotional and mental health outcomes, increased self-esteem and self-concept, increased motivation to learn, decreased bullying and violence, decreased student absenteeism, and mitigates the impact of socioeconomic risk on academic performance” (Kaplan et. al, 2016). Just through something as simple as kindness we can see “positive mental health outcomes, including reducing depressive symptoms and increasing subjective happiness and life satisfaction” (Kaplan et. al, 2016) in not only our students but staff as well.

Children today seem to have a hypersensitivity or are more susceptible to emotional dysregulation. As a child, I rarely remember moments when I was overly anxious about everyday occurrences. Children today are seemingly less happy go lucky as I believe generations past were. Learning how to regulate our emotions and practice self-talk is crucial in the early years for development. “We approach self-regulation skills in the same way we approach other skills, academic or social: isolate that skill and provide practice” (Bezsylo, 2018). Therefore, self-kindness needs to be where we begin in shaping the students and creating a child that is ready to share kindness with the world. We first must instill a sense of kindness for themselves. “Intentional Acts of Kindness should be incorporated into classrooms as a means of supporting students’ social and emotional well-being [...] encouraging and supporting students in performing IAK as a means of increasing individual student well-being, building positive interpersonal relations, and positively contributing to class and school climate” (Binfet, 2015). Self-image is a struggle for a lot of students. Children today are constantly inundated with media representations of unrealistic portrayals. We are quick to get down on ourselves and I hope that by learning to fill our own buckets with self-kindness and through learning about self-talk and self-image with our psychologist we can chart a different well-being route for my students. “Acts of kindness can build trust and acceptance between people, encourage social bonds, provide givers and receivers with the benefits of positive social interactions, and enable helpers to use and develop personal skills and thus themselves” (Binfet, 2015).

### **Meeting the Needs of Education for Sustainability**

Using the *Learning for the Future: Competences in Education for Sustainable Development* by the United Nations (2012), this project in more than one way fits the needs of education for sustainability. My project fits under three categories, the first being learning to know. Using a holistic approach, students will learn about the relationship and interdependence of people such as rich and poor and humans and nature. Students are presented with the problem of increasing kindness in their lives will be using reflection and planning to affect and envision change. The final elements of both learning to know and learning to do is focused on achieving transformation which is the basis of my project, transforming our classroom and school culture to one that fosters kindness. This project will be using creativity and interest-based learning as foundations to transform my student’s education

and to prepare my learners for new challenges. These priorities will promote the experiences of my students with real-world issues to make a difference.

This project also aligns with the learning to be elements in the *Competences for educators in Education for Sustainable Development* because I will be motivating students to make a change and positive contribution to other people. I will be the facilitator and also a participant in the project working to inspire creativity and innovation in my students as outlined under the achieving transformation outcomes. Lastly, students will engage with each other experts, families and within our school to build positive relationships.

Education for sustainability is about so much more than just the environment. O'Brien and Howard created the concept of a Living School. A Living School captures all the elements of Education for Sustainability by going further than fostering sustainability to include creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainable happiness, social emotional learning and fostering a connection with the outdoors. This project, while narrowly focused on creativity, interest based learning and kindness, develops into a project that reaches to all elements of a Living School. Through the exploration of self-kindness, students will be fostering their sense of happiness and well-being. As the project moves into social kindness, we will be fostering creativity and connections with our families, peers, friends and nature. The final stage of the project will support students in using creativity to build innovative action projects to further develop their learning. Meeting the needs of education for sustainability while providing meaningful learning opportunities for students is the backbone of this project. Kindness creates a relationship with all of the elements of a Living School while more importantly, "Living schools are predicated on a deep sense of meaningful contact with others and the larger living world that fundamentally carries our lives forward (O'Brien & Howard, 2016).

### **Project Goals:**

This project will inquire into how an early year's classroom can promote creativity, support students in exploring their passions through meaningful learning and build connections with others both in the school and outside. This project will be focused on grade one and two students, building their creative capacity to design, carry out and reflect on their own interest based action/change projects. This project is also designed to influence others to join our theme of kindness through participation in our action projects and intentional acts of kindness, both self and social. Lastly, this project will be used to encourage other teachers to introduce and explore interest based learning in their classrooms to foster creativity.

### **Goals:**

- To establish a culture of kindness
- To facilitate an interest-based action project with every student to promote kindness within our classroom, school, homes and community
- To build a focus on concern for others and concern for the community

- To build connections with others (new and old)
- To intentionally practice kindness

### Objectives:

- To conduct an environmental scan of HS Paul School and other public venues for representations of kindness
- To survey experts, colleagues and community members for project design, ideas and insights
- Natural occurrences of kindness in the hallways and classroom
- “Create prosocial agents within their school and larger communities (Binfet, 2015).
- To promote interest-based learning and a creativity focus in HS Paul School

### Barriers/Constraints

While this project has been well received by those involved so far, it does come with barriers and constraints to consider. The first is time management and ensuring the project is completed to its fullest without rushing any components. The three months plus a bit of reflection and evaluation time perfectly suits the three stages of this project and dividing each section into one month focuses. We are relying on the interaction of others to increase the reliability of our learning. Participation is voluntary but I am working in a very involved community and have already made connections with parents willing to participate and my class is buddies with the seniors at the local retirement residence who are also on board to participate. I have communicated with a psychologist and colleague in another school and grade who are willing to be part of our learning. I’m sure the more people learn about our project, the more they will want to become involved.

I anticipate the most difficult part of this project will be influencing other colleagues to build a capacity for interest-based teaching and learning in their classrooms. My goal is to inspire a flexibility into their teaching to support creativity and be open to a shift in beliefs. I plan to share my journey with them, highlight the successes and offer support in any way (modeling, planning, team-teaching). One other barrier is the fact that I am depending on the youngest students in the school to be the change-makers and to lead a positive change in school culture. This may seem naïve to some but I see it as encouraging. 6 and 7 year olds know no boundaries and truly do believe the impossible is possible. Their passion will be a welcome and celebrated attribute for school leadership. I am excited to see where their interests and passions take them, myself and our school on this learning journey.

### Timeline

Date:	Activity:		
Week of March 12	Introduce Self-Kindness	Read “Have you Filled a Bucket	-How can we fill our own bucket?

		Today?" & "How Full is Your Bucket"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Create a kindness journal to document each child's self-kindness</li> <li>-provide time daily to add to our journals using words, drawings and pictures</li> </ul>
Week of March 19	Learn about Self-Kindness from an Expert	Psychologist guest to share importance of self-kindness and ways to fill our own bucket (Dr. Andrea Janzen)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each student will create a goal and plan to increase self-kindness</li> <li>-Students will interview their parents at conferences to learn about kindness and how they show themselves self-kindness</li> </ul>
Week of March 26 (students on Spring Break)	Interview United Way	Gain information on creating a culture of kindness in a large public setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-phone interview b/w Julie and UW</li> <li>-Students will continue to journal over Spring Break</li> </ul>
Week of April 2	Self-Kindness Exploration	Continuing to find and document ways we are kind to ourselves each day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Write a letter to ourselves sharing all the reasons we have to be happy</li> </ul>
Week of April 9	Introduce Social Kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Question to begin class discussion about social kindness: "Let's pretend that you visited another school for a day and you were trying to decide if that school was a kind school or not. What things might you see, hear, or notice that would help you know</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Track observations of kindness in the school</li> <li>-Create kindness board in photocopy room for staff. Encouraging staff to leave a simple note acknowledging another.</li> </ul>

		whether or not the school is a kind place?" (Kaplan et al., 2016).	
Week of April 16	Learn about Social Kindness from an expert	-Skype interview w/ Thaddeus Bourassa & his students at General Vanier (leading a kindness campaign)	-Students will have previously created questions to ask
Week of April 23	Kindness Mapping	Where do we see Kindness? Where should we see kindness? What people are in need of acts of kindness?	Participate in intentional acts of kindness within our classroom.
Week of April 30	Family Kindness/Public Observations of Kindness	-Interview an Expert (United Way Rep) about the upcoming May Kindness Day in Winnipeg	Intentional acts of kindness in their families and throughout our school
Week of May 7	Kindness Recipients/Interest Inventory	Create a vast list of people/places/things in our lives that deserve kindness	Create list of interests that we could share with others (ie. Rainbow looming- could make rainbow bracelets for hospital patients)
Week of May 14	Begin Kindness Action Plans	Matching our interests to recipients	-Student will be preparing, planning, designing and building connections for action project
Week of May 21	Act on Plans		
Week of May 28	Reflect		
Week of June 4	Kindness Fair-Sharing our learning	Reflecting	-opportunity to share our projects with the rest of the school and our families
Week of June 11	Final Kindness Week-Celebration	Celebrating Us!	Celebrating our kindness projects with a celebration



			just for us, planned by the students.
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### **Evaluation**

Evaluation for this project will be very qualitative and subjective. Evaluation will be determined by observation and completion of interviews and surveys both pre and post project. The project will be examining if there is a positive increase in the classroom climate. Determining if students are happier and feel a sense of kindness. Also observing a change in the school climate. Are there natural occurrences of kindness in the hallways, more smiles, more holding of the door, simple hellos and displays of happiness? The markers of a successful project will be if colleagues become interested in fostering creativity in their classrooms and leading the learning through interest based priorities.

### **Sharing the Learning Journey**

Every step of the process of this project will be documented and shared using a digital curation site. Photos of our learning, activities and accomplishments will be posted. Videos of our discussions, social kindness learning and our kindness action projects. I will post about our conversations, observations and insights that I gain throughout the entire project. Students work will be showcased on the site and we will share it within our school and with families to encourage everyone to be part of our learning. Step by step the project will unfold in the classroom, school and community as well as online for those participating from afar.

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## Cape Breton University

Faculty of Professional Studies

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### Confirmation of Support from Collaborating Organization

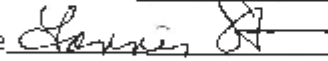
Project Title	<b>Promoting Kindness Through Creativity and Meaningful Connections</b>
Project Lead (student name)	<b>Julie Van Caeyzeele</b>
Contact Information	<b>91 Senecal Drive, St. Francois Xavier, MB (204)612-1159 julie.vancaeyzeele@lrds.net</b>

Instructor	<b>Dr. Patrick Howard</b>
Course	<b>EDUC6800: Education for Sustainability Project</b>
Contact Information	<b>1250 Grand Lake Rd., Cape Breton University, Sydney, NS. Tel: 902 563 1300 Patrick_howard@cbru.ca</b>

<b>Supervisor/Head of Collaborating Organization</b>	
Name	<b>Tannis Steiman</b>
Position	<b>Principal</b>
Organization	<b>HS Paul School</b>
Contact email/phone	<b>Tannis.steiman@lrds.net</b>

- I confirm that the school administration (or division head/management) is aware and fully supports the proposed applied research project.

Name: Tannis Steiman Position: Principal

Signature:  Date: March 6/18

(Head Department/Division)

(year/month/day)

19 March 2018

Julie Marie Van Caeyzeele  
Cape Breton University

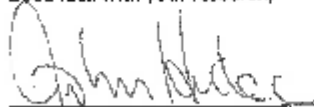
Dear Julie:

Re: Research Ethics File # 1718-097

The application for the project entitled "**Promoting Kindness Through Creativity and Meaningful Connections: An Applied Action Project**" has been received and the Cape Breton University Research Ethics Board (CBU REB) has granted **approval** to this research project.

Ethics approvals are granted for a period of one (1) year. Principal researchers of ongoing projects are required to submit an annual report for review. Any change to an approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation.

Good luck with your research,



Dr. John Hudec  
Assistant Professor, Community Studies  
Research Ethics Board Co-Chair

*Signed on behalf of the CBU REB*

Cc: Dr. Patrick Howard

## Activity 1: Define a Challenge

**Dreams and Gripe Session: Finding opportunities often begins with noticing problems or gaps. “I wish there was \_\_\_\_\_ in my school or organization.**

Dreams – things I wish would exist:

- Demonstrations of learning rather than Report cards
- Students without anxiety
- A play curriculum
- Classrooms fueled on interest/passion projects
- Outdoor learning curriculum
- Community connections daily

**Gripes – things that could be better**

- Meaningful tech implementation in early years
- EAL learner support
- Teaching time equivalents that include play and outdoor learning
- Exceptional learner supports
- SS/Sci/Health curriculums focused on skills not content
- Student happiness



**Flip the dreams and gripes into possible project design challenges. Begin with your question “How might we...?”**

- How might we demonstrate student learning without report cards?
- How might we decrease levels of anxiety in young students?
- How might we create an authentic play curriculum for early years classrooms?
- How might we create classrooms where learning is created by and for the students?
- How might we create and implement an outdoor learning curriculum?
- How might we successfully learn with and from the community on a more daily basis?

**How might we?**

- How might we make technology learning meaningful for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner?
- How might we better support new language learners?
- How might we better use our 6.5 hours of teaching time a day?
- How might we better support exceptional learners?
- How might we create a curriculum focused on skill acquisition?
- How might we increase student happiness?
- How might we use STEM projects to lead to action projects?

**Establish constraints – What constraints will I have to manage?**

- Time
- Definition of happiness
- Parent approval
- Administration support
- Teacher participation
- Level of understanding in gaining information from young children

**Define indicators of success – what measures will me know my ideas are successful?**

- Optimism/Enthusiasm
- Teachers want to collaborate
- Happy students
- Engaged and invested students
- Expressed interest from community, parents, colleagues
- Changing culture of classroom to school

**Other things to keep in mind...**

- Different perspectives of classroom priorities
- Outdoor learning- weather
- School themes & plans
- Divisional demands
- 
- 

**Sketch out your end goals – what will I work to produce?**

- Pilot curriculums in play and outdoor learning that motivate teachers to implement
- A guide to implementation
- Happiness
- Skill focused guides rather than content
-

## Write A Brief

**Write up a short 'brief' that clarifies the challenge you'd like to address. Write it as if you were giving it to someone else to design. Capture thoughts on why this is a problem, a challenge and what the opportunity for design will be.**

Children are seemingly less and less happy. Happiness has changed from an intrinsic value that stems from play and relationships to a feeling that is dependent on a device or possession. Children today are anxious, unfocused and often unengaged in their learning. Teachers are at this exciting period in education where new (or perhaps old) pedagogies are being implemented, tested, and experimented with. Play, outdoor learning and interest based self-guided learning are changing the dynamics of the traditional classroom.

I plan to research the results of classrooms that have integrated these three dynamics and the levels of happiness and satisfaction in their students. I will measure these against those of students that participate in a more traditional classroom setting.

### How might we?!

**Capture the design challenge you've decided to work on....**

#### CHALLENGE QUESTION:

How might play curriculum better guide meaningful play in my classroom? Would a guide

How might my classroom promote creativity, explore passions and support students in making connections?

Do interest/passion projects create happier, engaged and invested students?

A guide to play?

A guide to outdoor learning?



## Activity 2: Understand the Challenge

Name: Julie Van Caeyzeele

### Review the Challenge

**What are some of the things your classmates, colleagues, friends and family identified about the current challenge? Capture key thoughts, constraints, and barriers from your discussions.**

- Importance kindness to self
- Must love self and environment before can love others
- 21<sup>st</sup> century issues of body shaming
- The need to focus on compliments over negatives
- Kindness beyond community to world issues
- Time- will there only be time create change in classroom?
- Will school change need to happen next school year?
- Administration concerns over curriculum outcomes
- Rewards of valued practices for kindness

**Share what you Know About This Challenge? What would you like to know more about? Capture your assumptions, and your questions too.**

### I already know

- Interest projects create motivation and engagement but can it be sustained after project?
- Children will be enthusiastic and creative in the design of their projects

### I want to know more about

- Creating a culture of kindness
- Opportunities in the community to be kind without money involved
- Creating a learning space that is led by the students
- Supporting young learners to feel empowered to create big changes
- How to connect students to nature and build their motivation for environmental kindness
- Moving from conscious kindness to unconscious

**Did the input of others change your challenge topic? If so, capture it here...**

The input that I received gave me confidence that I am indeed on the right path. The input on constraints is helping me to decipher exactly how widespread I need to begin focusing on for the project given the enormity of Kindness and time.

**Define your audience**

**Who will you be designing for? Consider your core audience and your extended audience**

- My core audience is my 22 students. We will begin by looking at Kindness to self and the importance of a positive self-concept.
- We will look at how we affect those around us- Parents, classmates, peers in the hall, other teachers, community members, strangers at the store. Creating change in my students will hopefully create a ripple effect throughout their families, circles of friends etc...
- Each student will then choose their own audience for their action project.

**Consider any people who may assist you or even form a team to carry out your challenge**

**Team Member (s)**

**Goals/Roles**

-I have one teacher in each grade grouping at my school that is willing to participate in my project through interviews, supporting my students in their action projects, participating in activities and for observations/surveys. (Ange 1/2, Tom 3/4, Laurie 7/8, Shannon 5/6, Mackenzie K).

-My Principal supports this project since it nicely fits into our school theme of Moon Shot Thinking. Giving students the opportunity to design and create their own projects. Exemplifying to them that they should dream big and can make a difference.

-The Parents & Community will be participants through observation, interviews, surveys and more if they are willing to engage in the process with us.

## PREPARE RESEARCH/INFORMATION DISCOVERY

### Identify Places of Inspiration

**Where can you go to have an inspiring experience related to your project? What may be similar places, situations, settings where you could witness relevant behaviours in a similar setting?**

### Inspiring Locations/ Analogous Situations

-Other schools focusing on Kindness  
(General Vanier & Samuel Burland)

-Classrooms within my school that are creating a culture of kindness

-Shopping mall- observe acts of kindness independently and with my students

**Identify Sources of Inspiration – who are the people involved in your project? Who may be potential users? Participants? What experts do you want to meet with to learn about your topic? List the candidates you believe will provide the most inspiration and valuable insight and inspiration.**

Students- They always teach me the most

Colleagues- Different perspectives to include in project design, opportunities to learn from different age groups of learners

Parents- Kindness at home, how they support their child self-kindness?

Community- What do they think is lacking in terms of kindness in the community? How can we alter the community feel around the school? When the community brings up HS Paul- What do they say about us?

Community Leaders- Sharing their perspective of a kind community. What does kindness look like in their role?

United Way- Conscious Kindness Day- Potentially accessing them as an expert and participating in their annual event

Psychologists- the importance of self-kindness; both myself and students having the opportunity to ask questions and develop our self-concept

**SELECT RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS-** who specifically do you want to talk to and learn from? Create a description for at least three different users or sources of inspiration. Be sure to consider a diversity of gender, experience, ethnicity etc.

USER TYPE: **Students:** mine and a variety of different ages within the school and neighboring schools

USER DESCRIPTION: I want to learn what kindness is to them before and after our action projects. I want to investigate how to support their sense of being with self-kindness. How will the creation of their own action project change their perspectives?

USER TYPE: **Colleagues:** Within the school and in neighboring participating schools. Substitutes as well that get to feel the culture of many schools and can offer a different perspective an outsider to a building.

USER DESCRIPTION: As adults, is our view of kindness different than children or are we all seeking the same feelings? How can we support our learners in creative opportunities to build kindness in the school, for them personally and in all aspects of their lives.

USER TYPE: **Parents/Community**

USER DESCRIPTION: Do they view their children as being kind? How do they support them at home to share kindness? Are parents actively engaging in self-kindness and modeling the importance?

Finding out what it is that makes a community kind? What kind of kindness is noticed? How can we be kind to nature and the environment we refer to as our community? Students will be able to create connections with community members and a stronger connection to 'their' nature.

USER TYPE: **Experts**

United Way

Psychologists

USER DESCRIPTION: What has inspired others to be change makers? What ideas and creative inspiration can my students gain from experts and outside resources?

## BUILD A QUESTION GUIDE: INTERVIEW/SURVEY

What do you want to learn to better understand the project at hand? What are you hoping to learn about people's motivations? What do want to learn about their beliefs, activities etc? Fill in one of these sheets for each type of expert/participant/user/source of inspiration.

### **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS: how can you open the conversation?**

How did Conscious Kindness Day come to be?

What event or idea shaped the need for this event?

### **INTERVIEWEE NAME:**

United Way- Conscious Kindness Day Sponsors

### **Deeper Questions: What are ways to explore the motivations, hopes, frustrations this person may have?**

This one-day event is spectacular, but do you see any trickle affect after?

Have you had any feedback from the people involved? Those that receive or give?

How do you think this could be extended all year in a school setting?

## BUILD A QUESTION GUIDE: INTERVIEW/SURVEY

### **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS: how can you open the conversation?**

What is your role in the school? What has been your role throughout this campaign?

Why did you decide to focus on kindness this year? What event shaped the need for this in your school and division?

Who has created the kindness activities and events at your school? Have the students played a part in the creation?

### **INTERVIEWEE NAME:**

Thaddeus Bourassa- Teacher at General Vanier School

#Irsdgenerosity

### **Deeper Questions: What are ways to explore the motivations, hopes, frustrations this person may have?**

Do you feel the culture of your school has been changed?

What has supported student buy-in?

## BUILD A QUESTION GUIDE: INTERVIEW/SURVEY

### **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS: how can you open the conversation?**

Two interviews would be ideal. The first for me to investigate deeper into the concept of teaching self-kindness and the second for my students to learn from a psychologist and be able to ask questions.

### **INTERVIEWEE NAME:**

Psychologist- Self-Kindness & Self-Compassion

### **Deeper Questions: What are ways to explore the motivations, hopes, frustrations this person may have?**

Has there been an increase in the need for self-kindness education?



## BUILD A QUESTION GUIDE: INTERVIEW/SURVEY

### **SPECIFIC QUESTIONS: how can you open the conversation?**

Create a survey: (perhaps involve my students in the creation of the survey?)

-What is something kind that has happened to them?

-How did it make them feel?

-What are things that make them happy?

-How are they kind?

-my class will be able to use the information to inform our action projects

### **INTERVIEWEE NAME:**

Students

### **Deeper Questions: What are ways to explore the motivations, hopes, frustrations this person may have?**

-Do you think HS Paul is a kind school?

- What makes it kind?

-What makes it unkind?

-Are you kind to yourself? How do you show yourself kindness?

-How do you show kindness to nature?

## Observation Guide:

What are you looking to learn in this observation? Capture themes and questions that you want that you want to make sure you get to in your visit? Fill in one of these worksheets for each site you visit?

**Things to see: What are some things you want to make sure you observe on your visit?**

-The unconscious acts of kindness occurring in the unstructured times of the day (hallway, recess...)

-Special activities for their #Irsdgenerosity campaign

**OBSERVATION SITE:**

General Vanier School

**Things to do: What are some things you can do to gain some inspiration at this site?**

-Interview involved students

-Interview involved staff

-Bring my class to learn from the students at this school

-Set up a Skype tour and interview between classes

-Partner with their classroom for larger action plans

**OBSERVATION GUIDE:**

**Things to see: What are some things you want to make sure you observe on your visit?**

- The unconscious acts of kindness occurring in public
- Observing where kindness is missing
- Provide an opportunity for students to gain ideas for kindness action projects in the community

**OBSERVATION SITE:**

St. Vital Mall with my students

**Things to do: What are some things you can do to gain some inspiration at this site?**

- Have students interview people at the mall both shoppers and employees.
- Try some small acts of kindness to learn what might be successful

**WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY? – Explore the research literature including academic literature, professional, government, non- governmental, websites and digital sources to explore your topic further and gain knowledge and inspiration**

**Academic/Scholarly Resources:**

- Children's Perceptions of Kindness and Anonymity- Davis Shorr
- Encouraging Acceptance & Compassion Through Play- Thomas Moore
- Can Kindness Be Taught?- Ron Schachter
- Not-so Random Acts of Kindness: A guide to Intentional Kindness in the Classroom- John-Tyler Binfet
- Teachers' Perceptions of Kindness at School- John-Tyler Binfet & Holli-Anne Passmore

**Governmental/Non-governmental:**

- Compassion Project (Catholic Health Corporation of MB)

**Professional:**

- The Power of Kindness- Brian Goldman
- How to Raise Kind Kids- Thomas Lickona
- Teach Kindness First: Teaching Empathy One Conversation at a Time- Kathleen Murray
- Perpetual Kindness: Creating A Global Movement Towards Love-
- Create a Culture of Kindness in Middle School:48 Character Building Lessons-Naomi Drew
- Cultivating Kindness in School- Ric Stuecker
- Raising Happiness- Christine Carter

**Other:**

- Psychologists- WinnLove.ca
- OT- Jean McGinn (Self-Kindness/Mindful Self-Compassion)
- United Way- Conscious Kindness
- Cool2BeKind- Wpg. Police Assoc.
- Winnipeg Free Press- RAKs

### Dissemination Strategy Planning

1. What is the campaign purpose, the intended impact (benefit)?

The purpose of the project is to increase opportunities for creativity in a grade 1/2 classroom using interest based action projects.

The impact will be an increased engagement in learning and development of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication etc.

Under the theme of kindness, students will become change makers. Encouraging others to use their interests to share kindness and make a difference.

2. Describe the primary target audiences for your campaign.

The primary target audience is teachers. The hope is that the outcomes of the project show an unarguable need for more creativity opportunities in the school and more interest based learning priorities. Teachers will observe the skills that students are developing and will incorporate important strategies into their classrooms.

The project is under the theme of kindness and it is hoped that parents will recognize a difference in their child's capacity for kindness and ability to influence others.

3. What specifically do you want your audiences to do? To know? To believe?

I would like for audiences to see how meaningful learning opportunities that are based on student's choice and voice can be and how they can create more significant learning outcomes rather than content and curriculum driven learning focused.

#### 4. What key messages do you want your campaign to communicate?

Students (no matter the age) are creative beings that given the opportunity can create valuable learning opportunities for themselves based on their interests and passions. When students are given the opportunity to guide their own learning, the learning become more meaningful, authentic and the skills being gained are more in depth.

#### 5. What communication channels will you use? Consider what is available to you. (public media, print, school/organization networks/resources, social media channels etc. ) Be as specific as you can about ways you intend to use each channel you identify.

Using Wordpress as my project blog platform, I have been documenting every step of our learning journey through self-kindness, social-kindness to the development and completion of our interest-based kindness action projects.

I also use our classroom blog (Seesaw) to share with my students' parents. This is a site that I use daily to share our classroom activities and it is also where students can post themselves about their day, reflections and share their achievements.

I also plan to create a news story about our project that will be shared on our school and divisional websites.

Using Twitter, we will be sharing our Conscious Kindness Day activities and our action plans as they come to fruition.

6. What permissions will you require? (model release forms, parental permissions, school/board permissions)

Students require:

- Media releases
- Project participation consent forms

Adults require:

- Project participation consent forms

7. What creative strategy will you use? Consider highlights you will emphasize, scenes, sounds, images taglines, tone, overall impression to be achieved through graphic elements – text, colour, font, ect.

I want the blog to capture our process throughout the project. Highlighting the learning that my students are completing and sharing the experts, special activities and events they are participating in.

The best way to do this is through pictures and videos. A picture can say 1000 words is certainly true. Photos and videos better capture the students learning than writing.

My classroom is a bright and positive space and I hope that the blog portrays the same.

8. What costs, if any, may be associated with dissemination related strategies? What resources will you need to access? What may be available to help you achieve your strategies? (Consider both material and human)

The only cost that may be required is to upgrade the blog. Upgrading the blog would create more options for theme, layout and overall logistics control. At this point, it is not necessary and I am happy with the free version.

I would have to pay for this service personally.



## Promoting Kindness Through Creativity & Meaningful Connections

### Mid-Term Report

My action project has at times been felt slow in progression but then I look at the timeline of our learning, the goals and objectives and I see how far we have already come. As I look back at the project this far, excluding our final kindness action projects, I am so proud of what six and seven-year old children are capable of given the right opportunities.

This is a look a where we are in terms of meeting goals & objectives:

<p><b>Goals:</b> To establish a culture of kindness</p>	<p>-My classroom has developed into a culture of kindness in more than one way. Students use a language of kindness and can independently articulate kindness when they see it and when it is necessary.</p> <p>-We celebrated conscious kindness day on May 16<sup>th</sup>. My students planned the entire day for the school. We brought coffee in for the teachers, handed out cookies to the students as they arrived at school, and left sticky notes with nice phrases on each and every classroom door. We asked all students to bring in a non-perishable food item to donate to a local food bank. The day was better than expected. This was the first time we saw a culture of kindness begin. Children were so taken back by the cookies and notes that they completed kind acts within their classrooms because of it. One junior high class wrote a nice note for every other student in grade 7 and 8 and attached them to their lockers to find at lunch because they liked the notes they found on their classroom door and wanted to keep it going.</p> <p>-I am hopeful that our action projects will continue to build this culture as students will be asking for the support others in ways of collecting items for those in need, sharing a kindness, teaching and learning opportunities by my students and special activities.</p> <p>-It is hoped that through these activities students will become motivated to create their own kindness acts or just to become more aware of kindness and their role.</p>
<p>To facilitate an interest-based action project with every student to promote kindness within our classroom, school, homes and community</p>	<p>-These are in the works!</p> <p>-Each student chose to use their interest to offers kindness to others.</p> <p>-Examples are:</p> <p>~<b>Lucia</b>- interest: art</p> <p>-She is going to share her interest in art with the kindergarten students by reading them a story and teaching them how to complete an art piece based on it.</p> <p>~<b>Naveya</b>- interest: fashion</p> <p>-She is going to collect donations of clothing to donate to a local shelter.</p> <p>~<b>Sevara</b>- interest: cats</p> <p>-She is going to write letters to pet stores looking for donations of cat food that she can give to a cat shelter</p> <p>~<b>Michael</b>- interest: animals</p> <p>-He is asking family and friends of his for old blankets that he can donate to the zoo for the spring babies to use.</p>

	These are only 4 of 23 projects. They are all fantastic and I can't wait to see the impact they make on my students and others.
To build a focus on concern for others and concern for the community	-We are still working on this. We are certainly concerned for others and the community but in more of a disciplinary way. The students see a lack of kindness in areas and immediately need to share it within our class. I hope that we can turn this into an opportunity for them to act kindly instead of police kindness.
To build connections with others (new and old)	-The hope was that my students' action project would be farther reaching outside of our building. I was hoping we would target groups or people that might require kindness some days more than others. But I did not want to sway their projects, and wanted to only guide them to what they thought would be most fulfilling. -The students couldn't see past the walls of our school for the most part. They chose to create kindness projects that affected people in the building. This is telling of how little we are connected to the community. Certainly a place for growth. -Also, I think that students are looking for that instant gratification which is something they will receive through most of their project that are going to happen at school.
To intentionally practice kindness	-This has definitely been met! Students have practiced kindness within our classroom, with our buddies, within our families, with nature, within the school and now our projects are taking us into the community. They can pinpoint it and love to share the kindnesses they were able to witness or be part of.
<b>Objectives:</b> To conduct an environmental scan of HS Paul School and other public venues for representations of kindness	-We have completed an environmental scan of our school. Students observed in hallways and we were also fortunate enough that we all were able to sit in different classrooms and observe. Students were very critical which was excellent. We shared the successes we saw and together created a list of kind options that were available for the items that were not overly positive. -We have not been able to observe any public place. I'm not sure this will happen. The logistics have not panned out to get to the shopping mall. This part of the objective may not occur. Yet, students seem to have an eye for kindness now and will come to school from being in the public with sharing. This may have been unintentionally met.
To survey experts, colleagues and community members for project design, ideas and insights	We have been so fortunate to meet with many experts. -Psychologist-shared the importance of kindness on the brain -Grade 5/6 class from another school- ideas for social kindness, school plans and outcomes -United Way- share about Conscious Kindness Day. The why, and how we can get involved -Keith Macpherson- Mindfulness coach, musician and motivational speaker-shared the importance of kindness to ourselves
Natural occurrences of kindness in the	Through conversation with colleagues that also teach my students, music teacher, phys-ed and student services. They agree with me that my students do show more natural occurrences of kindness than other classes. They will

hallways and classroom	<p>most often point out their accomplishments but none the less are more outgoing than others.</p> <p>Conscious Kindness day gave me hope that the culture is shifting to one of more kindness. Next year, I would like to do a similar project earlier in the year to have more time for all students to naturally engage in the idea of kindness and for more culture building activities.</p>
“Create prosocial agents within their school and larger communities (Binfet, 2015).	<p>I’m not sure I will meet this objective outside of my classroom. Students are strong in their feelings about kindness within our safe group of classmates but struggle to have a voice when with others, especially that are older.</p> <p>For example: A group of students planned their kindness to the earth to be a clean up. They had it all sorted out where everyone would clean up, why it was important, posters they wanted to put up. Then when we met with grade 5/6s they had very little to say and our cleanup ended up being like all the other clean ups do at school.</p> <p>Perhaps a project with social aspects would be better suited to the fall so that students have a longer time to build up their confidence in their cause and can better lead. Or it may have to do with their age, being the youngest in the school.</p>
To promote interest-based learning and a creativity focus in HS Paul School	<p>This has occurred in my classroom.</p> <p>After completion of the projects and an opportunity to share the projects with colleagues, I am hoping that there will be an interest at HS Paul School for more interest based learning and the opportunity for student voice in their learning.</p>

#### Constraints & Barriers:

Time management: ensuring the project is completed to its fullest without rushing any components	<p>This far everything has been running smoothly and on time. In the early stages of the project, where my focus was on front loading my students with the information they would need, I felt at times this was going to slow. It was a difficult balance of going slowly enough for my students to understand everything and quickly enough to not lose their interest. We are currently right in line with the expected time line.</p>
The project relies on others interacting with us to increase the authenticity and importance of our learning	<p>-I have been so fortunate to have all of the experts in my proposal work out. They were more engaging for my students than I could have imagined.</p> <p>-91% of my parents have agreed to their child’s and their participation in the project (that’s only 2 students that I did not receive permission from)</p> <p>-As the action projects unfold we will see how involved our community and school become.</p>
Influencing other colleagues to build a capacity for interest-	<p>I have felt genuine interest in my project from colleagues and they have asked for me to share the projects when completed.</p> <p>Staff has also offered to support my students in anyway needed.</p>

based teaching and learning in their classroom	Based on these precursors, I do believe that there is potential for interest in learning about the strategies I used in this project. -The projects are to wrap up mid-June which unfortunately is busy time of the year for teachers. They may not be interested in learning new strategies at this time of the year. A September sharing might be more realistic.
Depending on the youngest students in the school to be the change-makers and to lead a positive change in school culture	-I'm torn in this area. It has certainly been a barrier because my students are not yet ready to be leaders or change agents with older students. They are confident in their families and with peers of the same age or younger but I am still learning ways to support them in working on this. -Conscious Kindness day was a huge confidence boost. The feedback we have received is boosting their engagement in our final projects. Their action plans also will help them build their capacity to lead since it is based on their interests and they love to share their interests. I think that these final projects will be much more culture building as students are becoming more comfortable being kindness ambassadors.

#### Timeline:

My timeline has worked out almost exactly as projected. One of the experts we were interviewing had to be accessed outside of the scheduled week but aside from that I have worked to ensure we are on target to complete the project in time.

In summary, I am very pleased with the progress of my project. My students are genuinely conscious about kindness and efforts of kindness have increased in the building. Other adults in the building comment regularly about the kind language and actions of my students. So far, I have learned that too much frontloading can build boredom of a subject. The pace needs to be quick enough to spark curiosity the entire time. I have always believed repetition is important but this project showed me that students want and need the opportunity to steer the learning immediately. I saw this first hand in their planning of our conscious kindness day and in the growth of their action projects. I have had great feedback from other professionals about the impact this project will have on my students. My students are learning that their interests can be used to make a difference for others and themselves. I have also learned that students struggle to see beyond the walls of the classroom as opportunities for leaning. When creating their interest projects, they felt only comfortable connecting with people in the school and their families, I would like to see a confidence with the community build to create new connections. All in all, everything has come together nicely and we are beginning the final and most exciting stage.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am working to complete my last course for my Masters of Education in Sustainability, Creativity and Innovation through Cape Breton University. You are invited to participate in my research study focusing on the promotion of creativity through student created action projects.

Education is at an exciting period of transitioning from more of a traditional style to more of a transformative one. Education is shifting to a more progressive style of teaching and learning where students are gaining a 21<sup>st</sup> century education focused on skill attainment and interest based learning. We are at a crossroads with an equally important theme of kindness across the world. Children are constantly inundated through the news and social media with demonstrations of anti-social, violent and destructive behaviour. "Our children need to gain an understanding of the power of being kind and the impact it can have when we are not [...] Sending simple notes or doing monthly projects teaches children that they each play a significant role in our community, as well as our world" (Hettenbach 2017).

This project proposes to, under a theme nurturing kindness, inquire into how classrooms might promote creativity, explore passions and support students in creating connections. The findings will be used to inform practice and to share with colleagues in preparation for class planning. This study will ask participants to complete surveys and interviews throughout the three months that will seek information concerning kindness, interest projects and creating connections.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. All children will participate in the kindness project as part of their curriculum. However, you have the right to terminate your participation and your child's by not having any contributions to the research component included. Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained and no names will be shared. Your participation will benefit classroom planning and better meeting the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner. All data collected will be stored in a secure location. Access to the data will only be granted to the researcher. All information collected is confidential and will only be part of project planning and the design of the kindness project.

Thank-You for considering to be part of this study,

Sincerely,

Julie Van Caeyzeele

Hettenbach, Melissa. (2017) *Why I believe teaching kindness is more important than ever*. Retrieved from: <https://www.weareteachers.com/teaching-kindness/>

## Researcher

If you require information about this study, please contact Julie Van Caeyzele at 204-254-7477 or by email at [Julie.vancaeyzeel@lrds.net](mailto:Julie.vancaeyzeel@lrds.net).

## Supervisor

If you have any other questions regarding your participation in this research, you may also contact Patrick Howard at Cape Breton University at 902-563-1300 or by email at [Patrick\\_howard@cbu.ca](mailto:Patrick_howard@cbu.ca).

## Informed Consent

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed of the purpose of this research and agree for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study.

\_\_\_ I would be willing to complete a brief questionnaire to offer a parental perspective.

If you have any questions that have not been answered satisfactorily by the researcher(s) or supervisor(s) named above, please contact:

CBU Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS), Dr. Dana Mount at (902) 563-1338, email: [ethics@cbu.ca](mailto:ethics@cbu.ca)

Chair of the Research Ethics Board at CBU, Dr. Kathy Snow, at (902)563-1170, email: [kathy\\_snow@cbu.ca](mailto:kathy_snow@cbu.ca)

Co-chair of the Research Ethics Board at CBU, Dr. John Hudec at (902) 563-1982, email: [john\\_hudec@cbu.ca](mailto:john_hudec@cbu.ca).

*Note: Participants are to be informed of the researcher(s)' "Duty to disclose" suspected abuse or neglect of a child or an adult in need of protection. Under section 23(1), Nova Scotia Children and their Family, The Protection of Children and Adoption (1990) states that "Every person who has information, whether it is confidential or privileged, indicating that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report that information to an agency." Agency is defined as "an agency continued by or established and incorporated pursuant to the act..." that is, Nova Scotia Department of Community Service Child Welfare.*

# INFORMED CONSENT - ADULT

## Promoting Kindness Through Creativity and Meaningful Connections

**Dear Participant,**

You are invited to participate in a research study focusing on the promotion of creativity through student created action projects being conducted for a graduate course at Cape Breton University by Julie Van Caeyzeele. The course instructor and research advisor is Dr. Patrick Howard.

Education is at a pivotal time in transitioning from the traditional to the transformative. Schools have been preparing their students for a work force that no longer exists. Education needs to shift to a more progressive style of teaching and learning where students are gaining a 21<sup>st</sup> century education focused on skill attainment and interest- based learning. We are at a crossroads with an equally important theme of kindness across the world. Children are constantly inundated through the news and social media with demonstrations of anti-social, violent and destructive behaviour. "Our children need to gain an understanding of the power of being kind and the impact it can have when we are not [...] Sending simple notes or doing monthly projects teaches children that they each play a significant role in our community, as well as our world" (Hettenbach 2017).

This project proposes to, under a theme of nurturing kindness, inquire into how classrooms might promote creativity, explore passions and support students in creating connections? The findings will be used to inform practice and share with colleagues in preparation for class planning. This project will be in collaboration with the grade one and two students in my class at HS Paul School. This study will ask participants to complete surveys and interviews throughout the three months that will seek information concerning kindness, interest projects and creating connections.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any part of the study, you have the right to terminate your participation. You may choose to have your name shared in the study or remain anonymous. Your participation will benefit classroom planning and better meeting the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner. Classroom. All data collected will be stored in a secure location. Access to the data will only granted to the researcher. All information collected is confidential and will only be used as part of planning and implementing the classroom project.

Thank-You for considering to be part of this study,

Sincerely,

Julie Van Caeyzeele

Hettenbach, Melissa. (2017) *Why I believe teaching kindness is more important than*  
ever. Retrieved from: <https://www.weareteachers.com/teaching-kindness/>

## Researcher

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## Supervisor

If you have any other questions regarding your participation in this research, you may also contact Patrick Howard at Cape Breton University at 902-563-1300 or by email at [Patrick\\_howard@cbu.ca](mailto:Patrick_howard@cbu.ca)

## Informed Consent

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed of the purpose of this research and agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_ (initial) I consent to my name being in study

\_\_\_ (initial) I prefer to remain anonymous in study

If you have any questions that have not been answered satisfactorily by the researcher(s) or supervisor(s) named above, please contact:

CBU Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS), Dr. Dana Mount at (902) 563-1338, email: [ethics@cbu.ca](mailto:ethics@cbu.ca)

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