



JOHN  
ROZEMA  
AWARD FOR  
TEACHER  
EXCELLENCE

THE INAUGURAL  
SHORTLIST  
2016

I am thrilled by the standard of the shortlist this year and excited to celebrate excellence in Ontario's Christian schools which ultimately helps us all to flourish.

*Elisabeth Green*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR,  
CARDUS EDUCATION

The John Rozema Teaching Excellence Award recognizes excellence as an ongoing investment into the life of a Christian school community and a positive public contribution to the common good. Being shortlisted for the John Rozema Teaching Excellence Award is an indication of a particular educator or school community's reputation for giftedness and excellent practice.

I am delighted to be associated with this award for excellence in teaching and to join Cardus in celebrating the excellent work being done in Ontario's Christian schools.

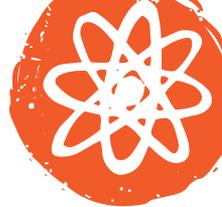
—John Rozema



## NOMINEES

HALTON HILLS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
HAMILTON DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL  
TORONTO DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL





## INNOVATIVE LEARNING PRACTICES

### HALTON HILLS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

**We want our students to do quality work and develop Christian character and so we too must keep refining our craft knowing that if we want a different tomorrow we must be willing to do things we did not do yesterday.**

**— Marianne Vangoor, Principal**

In December 2014, a group of seven Halton Hills Christian School (HHCS) teachers approached Marianne Vangoor, Principal at HHCS, with an idea to change the school's traditional science fair and public speaking fest. The teachers wanted to incorporate aspects from both events into a series of authentic interdisciplinary projects. Their goal was to teach students necessary skills, challenge them to think critically, and foster engagement with the broader Halton Hills neighborhood.

After running the idea past parents a few months later, the teachers were given the green light to move forward with their vision. Projects began to take shape, each one springing from real life questions about concrete realities in the Halton Hills community. Students explored how to best manage traffic flow on Trafalgar Road by researching archeological issues in Halton Hills, conducted door-to-door interviews with nearby residents, acted as photographers, and met with professionals. Each group prepared a presentation with the recommendation to widen, re-route or leave Trafalgar Road alone.

Another project asked students to determine whether or not a public transit system is a worthwhile endeavor for Halton Hills. Grade 7/8 students researched transit systems in Mississauga and Brampton, read municipal level reports, rode public transit buses, interviewed passengers, spoke with real estate agents, and more.

Exposure to such a wide variety of perspectives helped students learn how to see several sides of a single issue. As they prepared to lead a debate on the role of public transportation in Halton Hills, students became more adept at understanding both the pros and the cons of their own arguments. Ultimately, this made them more effective debaters.

The school wide shift to project based learning turned HHCS into a collaborative and creative hive of activity, as students created beautiful work together and honed a wide range 21st century learning skills.

These learning experiences were made possible because there were teachers at HHCS who saw amazing potential in their school community, and were willing to identify where past practices fell short. Not only did they have the courage to suggest that speech fests and science fairs had limited purpose beyond the project itself and a report card grade, they worked tirelessly to implement an exciting alternative.

**“These projects were going to assist us in helping our students see that their voices mattered in our community and that as young people they could actually have a significant role.”**

“Leading projects that had direct implications for our local community excited us,” reflected one teacher. “These projects were going to assist us in helping our students see that their voices mattered in our community and that as young people they could actually have a significant role regarding the issues identified. We wanted them to wrestle with questions that had no easy answers and to discern how Christians should respond.” 🌸

## INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING PRACTICES HAMILTON DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

*“From the beginning it was clear that we were going to need exceptional teachers willing to stretch themselves beyond what many would consider a ‘normal’ classroom.”*

—Nathan Siebenga, Principal

MegaBloc is a new Grade 9 Design Block Course at Hamilton District Christian High School, that combines Communication Technology, Manufacturing Technology, and Technological Design. The course was born out of a desire to emphasize hands-on learning, draw out beautiful work from students, and foster a stronger sense of community among grade 9 learners.

Five teachers from vastly different areas of expertise needed to work together to plan, develop, and implement MegaBloc. The team consisted of Kasia Konstany, a trained musician, Eric Brink, a technology and humanities expert, Richard VanderWier, a skilled shop teacher, Jonathan Devries, an art teacher with a technical flare for design, and MegaBloc leader, Harry Blyleven, an educator with expertise in Math, Business, IT, and Project Based Learning.

**“The Capstone Project was by far my favourite thing in the program,” reflected one student. “I liked it because we could choose the things that we really enjoyed and wanted to get better at. I decided to show off God’s wonderful creation through pictures.”**

Under the guidance of this diverse group of passionate educators, grade 9 students flourished in unexpected ways: They built pumpkin launching trebuchets, produced their own creations using 3D printers, designed their dream homes with the help of a program called Sketch-up and collaborated online using Google Docs.

Although students were invited to learn a variety of skills throughout the process, they also had the chance to go deeper into a particular area of interest, during a nine-day phase of the course called Elective Blocks, and later, through their Capstone

projects. For some, that meant becoming immersed in the world of technical drawings or photography. For others, it was a time to delve into video editing or environmental design. Final projects were assessed using a rubric that emphasized HDCH's Habits of a Graduate rubric: competence, reflection, compassion, resilience, and creativity.

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During MegaBloc, students were frequently invited to engage in rigorous planning. As they moved through the various phases of the trebuchet project, students learned how to refine their work from each stage in order to improve on the next. The gears of MegaBloc were oiled by teamwork, and dependent on healthy interpersonal relationships. This dimension of the course was meant to "cultivate character through learning"—a key part of the HDCH mission statement.

MegaBloc gave students the chance to build character by supporting each other through the giving and receiving of constructive feedback during each project. Meeting regularly for shared devotions each week was also a part of ongoing character formation—the kind that can only happen in community. A sense of unity among grade 9 classes grew with each passing day, since students knew they were all taking part in Megabloc at the same time, experiencing similar interdisciplinary challenges.

**"What started as a dream to have all students engage in the design process, to develop the Habits of a Graduate and to learn technical skills, has turned into a community building, exceptional learning experience ...and all of this is possible because of the incredible group of teachers who delivered this experience."**

**—Nathan Siebenga**



Opportunities for MegaBloc students to serve others within and beyond school walls were plentiful too. Whether they were developing presentations about how to use technology in a responsible way, helping out at food banks downtown, or contributing to a culture of academic excellence at their school through artfully designed projects, students were invited to maximize their potential for the public good.

As the teachers behind Megbloc coached students through the process—each one pulling from a different area of expertise—they were creating a community of innovators and culture makers.

“What started as a dream to have all students engage in the design process, to develop the Habits of a Graduate and to learn technical skills, has turned into a community building, exceptional learning experience,” reflected HDCH Principal, Nathan Siebenga. “And all of this is possible because of the incredible group of teachers who delivered this experience.” 🌍

## ONE VISION, TWO VOICES

### TORONTO DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

*“The growth in thought, ideas, and perspectives is displayed through the students’ expanding skills in communication in writing and, especially, speaking. The wonder of it is that students have been actively empowered to think about who they are in light of where they are and whose they are.”*

*—William Groot, Principal*

The student experience in Toronto District Christian High School’s Perspectives course is all about pairs. English and Bible. Faith and learning. Classroom and class trip. Present and future. All of these, under the collaborative guidance of John Terpstra and Sean VanEerden, a pair of teachers with an unusually strong dedication to seamless team teaching.



Terpstra and VanEerden crafted an integrated “Block” course. Half of their students would start the day in English studies, half in New Testament/World Religions. At the halfway point, the two groups switched.

At first, the teachers had more modest aims: shared audiences, communal class trips, easier timetables. Yet, the teachers note, “From casual talks over coffee to intentional discussions about curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in our own Professional Learning Community (P.L.C.), our two courses of English and Bible began to dovetail, and we saw the cracks that would allow a more comprehensive and integrated light to shine. We began pragmatically, however as we began to analyze the overlap in our curricula, we were confronted again and again with the innate integration evident in God’s creation, whatever the disciplinary expression.”

Core to the Perspectives course is a class service trip to downtown Toronto, including extensive preparation on social justice issues including homelessness, prostitution, refugees, inequality, shelter systems, and more.

**“We are convinced that that intentional union of English and New Testament expands the vision and reach of both courses.”**

Far from letting either course suffer as part of a combined whole, Terpstra and VanEerden oversaw the blossoming of two challenging curricula. The English 11 course brought students to gutsy texts like *Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver, and T.S. Eliot’s *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. And from classroom study of Christianity and world religions, applied then to the faces around them in their downtown experience, students are dramatically impacted. They emerge from Perspectives far less likely to put life and school and culture into different boxes. Rather they learn how all of life fits together under God, and how to take their places for lives of worship.



To our students, write Terpstra and VanEerden, “the math test they wrote just a week before pales in comparison to the import of being Christ to the marginalized and disenfranchised. It is this last notion, this particular approach to service, that has given us the most grief as we seek to educate students about the grand vocation of Kingdom citizenship. The lesson? All of life is service. No duality.”

Terpstra and VanEerden also encourage the team teaching model among their colleagues. Like relay runners, they drive each other. And the students emerge as winners. “We are convinced that that intentional union of English and New Testament expands the vision and reach of both courses. We are also convinced that the students leave our Perspective courses with a more mature, responsible, service-oriented, God-centered vision for their future.” ❁





**NOMINEES:**

MARY RUTH DOWNS

LISA EELKEMA

CAROL VERBEEK

AUDREY MCGREGOR





## INQUIRY BASED LEARNING

MARY RUTH DOWNS  
COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL,  
METCALFE

**“My desire is to instill a love of learning, not a collection of facts.”**

**—Mary Ruth Downs**

Mary Ruth Downs has a passion for inquiry based learning; an approach to education that begins by posing questions, scenarios or problems, rather than simply presenting facts or a single path to knowledge.

Mary’s application of inquiry based learning is fuelled by a spirit of curiosity and wonder. Every day she aims to leave room for her kindergarten students to articulate what it is they find perplexing, fascinating, or strange. Such moments are often starting points for her lessons and project ideas.

This year Mary added a “Transportation Wonder Lab” to her classroom. For a period of time every day, students were encouraged to ask questions they had about wheels and transportation. Conversations led the class to build ramps, different types of cars, and even examine a wheel barrow.

Mary encourages question asking in other classroom routines too. For Show and Tell Mary challenges her students to bring in objects that make them “wonder” so that they can become the “Wonder Kid” for the day. One child brought in a bird’s nest, which led to the question of “How does a bird make a nest?” The students had fun dissecting nests after that and eventually made their own from materials outside.

**“Adding wonder questions to my classroom practice brought about true creativity, risk taking and collaboration in my students.”**

Mary's students have also constructed their own penguin spy cams—another project that started with an “I wonder” question. This time it was sparked by footage from a penguin documentary that the class watched together.

“I have come to value learning that results from questions arising from the learner rather than the teacher,” shared Mary. “Adding wonder questions to my classroom practice brought about true creativity, risk taking and collaboration in my students.”

## DATA ASSESSMENT

LISA EELKEMA

LAURENTIAN HILLS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Laurentian Hills Christian School teacher, Lisa Eelkema, has seen her students accomplish great things. The young people in her class have presented their own urban planning designs to city councillors, partnered with adults in the community to analyze dystopian literature, and written well-crafted editorials critiquing global and local responses to natural disasters.

When it comes to her role as educator, Lisa describes herself as a “muddler in the middle” and not a “sage on the stage” who simply imparts information for the class to passively receive. Instead, she walks alongside students as they learn, encouraging active engagement with the community and collaboration amongst peers whenever possible.

This teaching style is effective for Lisa because of her commitment to knowing each student's strengths and weaknesses. Before implementing a project, Lisa will work hard to grasp how her students excel and struggle as learners, through data analysis, learning targets, and assessment. This year, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test informed Lisa's approach to planning her project based learning (PBL) units. Data from the test, which focuses on Reading, Language Arts and Mathematics, prompted Lisa to group students according to skill level, so that she could better target her instruction.



In preparation for a unit, Lisa will determine the skills she will teach, how she will group her students, and the supports she will use to meet the various needs in her classroom.

Lisa desires to give young people the chance to take ownership of their learning too. When a project is underway, students are encouraged to consistently revise their work, take part in think-pair-share feedback sessions and listen to one another. Upon completion of a project, Lisa will invite students to write about what they think they did well, or what they might do differently next time. The process from start to finish invites the learner to pause and think critically about how they might continue to grow and improve.

By making reflection and assessment a priority, Lisa invites students to be mindful of their full potential. In this way she encourages students to pursue academic excellence as they respond to the school's vision statement and "intentionally engage God's world, locally and globally" through what they make together.

These efforts are not lost on the broader community. After the class completed an urban planning project, Lisa received a very encouraging email from the city planner who had collaborated with students on the assignment. The letter made specific mention of the students' "quality of work, well thought out concepts" and "incredible public speaking skills".

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That kind of feedback is music to any educator's ears. For Lisa, and for her creative, hardworking students, it was certainly well deserved. 



## CHOICE IN LEARNING

CAROL VERBEEK  
WOODSTOCK CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

This year, Carol Verbeek of Woodstock Christian School embarked on a five-month project-based learning (PBL) journey with her intermediate students. She and her grade 7/8 class partnered with community experts from the local River Conservation Authority and a corporate environmental department to complete several field studies in their local watershed. The project included real data collection for the Conservation Authority to determine water quality in a local creek, planting trees and shrubs in a wetland area, and touring a Water Supply and Management facility. Conservation and water management experts were invited to the classroom to unpack the data the students had collected, as well as to provide workshops about local and Canadian watersheds. By the time students entered the third phase of their environmental learning journey, they were excited to move forward with their goal of reducing the hazards that amphibians and reptiles face around roadways near local wetland wildlife habitats.

As Carol led her Grade 7 /8 students through the intensive PBL experience, she sought to honour the wide range of learning needs, abilities, and gifts in her class. Before starting the watershed study, Carol's students participated in growth mindset activities and took multiple intelligence inventories. These practices made them more aware of their unique gifts and learning styles. Later that year, multiple intelligence choice boards helped students decide what form their final watershed reports would take. Suggestions on the choice board fell under categories like verbal, musical and kinesthetic (just to name a few) and were intended to help students self reflect on their strengths and their learning. The results were beautiful in their diversity. Students designed water-related games, composed and sang water ballads, created artwork, and completed photojournalism assignments.

As students learned about the reality of their watershed, and explored what that meant for them as stewards of God’s creation, Carol invited them to be actively and authentically involved in each other’s learning. They consulted with peers, followed specific “critical friends” protocols, and learned how to give kind, precise feedback.

**Carol’s students participated in growth mindset activities and took multiple intelligence inventories.**

“Carol modeled to her colleagues at WCS a meaningful way to engage students in learning that looks very different from traditional ways”, shared Bernice Huinink, Principal at Woodstock Christian School. “To see the engagement, excitement and growth among students, to watch Carol lead her students throughout this study was inspiring.” 



## EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

AUDREY MCGREGOR  
TRINITY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, BURLINGTON

During her residency at High Tech High (HTH) in San Diego, Audrey McGregor was struck by the ideas shared by Rick Riordan, HTH founder. Riordan stressed that teachers need to be “facilitators” in the process of helping “information saturated” students engage with the content of curriculum. Why? Because this kind of mentorship and guidance plays a role in shaping a student’s identity as a human being.

Through her projects and lessons, Audrey strives to do just that for the students she teaches at Trinity Christian School. A desire to be more than just a depositor of information has inspired her to seek out a more progressive approach to education whenever she can. The shift has pushed her to embrace the beautiful core values embedded in an expeditionary learning model: Mastering skills and knowledge, developing strong culture and character within the classroom and creating beautiful work with students.

Audrey's students have leaned into those values through a number of rich learning experiences—including a recent puppet theater project, inspired by the question “What does it mean to be created in God’s image?” Students wrote scripts for a play and created puppets, all with the goal of conveying a message they discovered through a Max Lucado book. “

The project covered a ton of language expectations, as well as some history and art requirements,” said Audrey. One of the more challenging aspects of the process was the building of the set, she said. Four of the advanced Math students in the class spent time drawing, planning, measuring, purchasing materials, and putting together a portable puppet theatre.

Audrey has also facilitated a discipleship project that had students responding to 11 stories from Jesus’s ministry by taking part in acts of compassion. They baked cookies, sent cards, donated allowance money, worked at food banks, purchased gifts, made art, and found joy in generosity.

**“If I fully believe that we are the body of Christ and each person has been given gifts and abilities, then how does that change my understanding of assessment and instruction?”**

As she carries out these projects, Audrey’s pursuit of excellence is marked by the meaningful questions she is willing to ask herself along the way: “If I firmly believe that every square inch of this world belongs to God, then how does my learning spaces proclaim His greatness?” she reflects. “If I fully believe that we are the body of Christ and each person has been given gifts and abilities, then how does that change my understanding of assessment and instruction?”





**NOMINEES**  
DAVID ROBINSON  
DAVID VANCE



## THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

DAVID ROBINSON

TORONTO DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

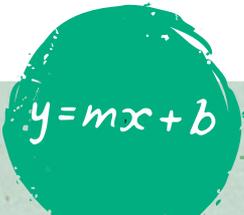
The kind of learning that TD Christian School students experience under David Robinson's leadership seems to spill out of the classroom, into the hallway, and out into the broader community.

Much of David's effectiveness as a teacher hinges on his ability to enroll and empower students through learning that is both theoretical and practical. His fondness for hands-on learning translates into a wide range of tactile experiences for his students—from constructing Lego robots with kindergarteners, to building hydraulic arms, to studying glacial formations and soil patterns at Algonquin Park.

**The kind of learning that students experience under David Robinson's leadership seems to spill out of the classroom, into the hallway, and out into the broader community.**

One of the most impressive projects carried out by David resulted in his Engineering Block students creating sound absorption panels. It started with a request from a Communications Technology teacher at the school, who was tired of hallway noises disrupting his class.

From there, a wonderful learning experience began to unfold. Not only could David's students offer a creative solution to a very real noise problem in their school, they could put the sound management theories they'd been learning about into practice. With the help of their teacher, the students designed and cut wooden frames, filled them with sound-absorbing insulation and wrapped the structure with fabric. Later, students moved on to creating sound panels with just wood, carving different geometric designs into the surface, which resulted in sound diffusion and cancellation.



$$y = mx + b$$

“The panels have transformed our recording studio and drama areas so that they are now rented commercially,” shared David. “My hallway is a more peaceful place to be during the inter-period rush. It is their legacy and gift to the school.”

There is data to prove the effectiveness of the project, too. As a bonus assignment, one of David’s students was tasked with the job of doing an audio sweep of the hall before and after the panel installation. The sound wave analysis file showed that the panels reduced noise intensity by 20 decibals and cut the reverberation time in half.

**“While memorization of facts and theories has a place in learning, it truly gains importance when implemented in experiments or experiences.”**

Since then, students have worked hard to improve sound absorption in other areas of the school. Classrooms and study corners that were once noisy, echo-filled spaces are now quiet, peaceful places to learn (most of the time, at least).

Projects like these are what make TD Christian Principal, William Groot so appreciative of David’s teaching practices.

“While memorization of facts and theories has a place in learning, it truly gains importance when implemented in experiments or experiences,” he said. “These give a richness to learning, as concepts are supported by the concrete. The impact is deep as students internalize and integrate what they have learned for the long term.”

There are numerous “deep learning” moments that David can look back at with pride as an educator—some of which occurred during excursions in the wilderness, others in the classroom. One of David’s proudest moments as a teacher happened at an Edifice Christian School Teachers’ conference. Knowing that there was a strong demand for robots in schools, David and his students led a double session on how to build and program Lego robot.

“Current club members and graduates sacrificed an entire day to help keen teachers from around Ontario become comfortable

and then confident with robotics,” he recounted. “Twelve schools received a kit each and committed to starting class centres or school clubs in robotics. That’s transforming culture!” ●

## AN INFORMED CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

DAVID VANCE

REDEEMER CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL, OTTAWA

As a philosophy and worldview teacher at Redeemer Christian High School, David Vance strives to help students clarify and articulate a coherent Christian worldview. Behind his lesson plans, project designs and student interactions is a desire to make sense of how that worldview relates to the dominant ideas of secular society. When it comes to exploring the “big” questions about social and cultural realities, David doesn’t shy away from topics that others might deem as too controversial. The example he sets reminds students that there is great value in entering a dialogue—even when it seems hostile to the Christian perspective.

One of the most challenging projects David took on with his class was a bible study on gender. David acknowledged the “tremendous potential for conflict” within his class, given the mix of very conservative and very progressive students taking part in the gender bible study—many of whom had strong opinions about what the role of women should be in Canada.

**When it comes to exploring the “big” questions about social and cultural realities, David doesn’t shy away from topics that others might deem as too controversial.**

He took time to weigh the pros and cons of exploring such a sensitive topic. “I began to realize that this was a tremendous and authentic learning opportunity, even if it deeply intimidated me,” he shared. “Yet my responsibility as an educator was clear – I had

to ask the difficult questions and lead the students to wherever that investigation took us. I prayed for courage.”

So, David set to work, eager to help students frame their ideas about gender within a biblical and cultural context. Students were to look at four of the most challenging biblical passages about the role of women and then discuss the cultural considerations that would have informed the way

those texts would have originally been interpreted. The class was invited to look for enduring truths that could be taken from the passages, and consider how they might tangibly respond. They had the chance to hear a respected guest speaker who specializes in addressing biblical truths in sensitive situations, along with two female teachers with very different perspectives about gender.

David is now glad he organized the study, realizing that the conversations it inspired mattered deeply to his students.

“Our text book made the modern social science claim that gender expectations were entirely culturally determined and had no basis whatsoever in truth,” he explained. “Many of our students were unsatisfied with this simplistic answer, believing that God has a plan for gender—that it is part of his design for human beings and should be taken seriously.”

**“My responsibility as an educator was clear—I had to ask the difficult questions and lead the students to wherever that investigation took us. I prayed for courage.”**





WADE VAN BOSTELEN



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**2017**  
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$$y = mx + b$$