

# Learning at TDChristian



June 22, 2022

*By Anneke Gretton*

Congratulations students! You have learned and grown this year. This week, we celebrate all that students have learned as they participate in culminating activities and exams. We are thankful for God's grace as we have grown and learned together this year.

Our final assembly on Friday highlighted the gifts and efforts of students in music, film, academics, leadership, and more. It was such a joy to celebrate student achievements, awards, and performances. God has given many gifts to our student body, and it was wonderful to see students using these gifts to God's glory.

We hope that students and staff enjoy the change of pace of summer break, and we look forward to being back together again in the fall. See you on September 1<sup>st</sup> for Back in the Groove or September 6<sup>th</sup> for the first day of school!

June 8, 2022

*By Anneke Gretton*

This week, we celebrated student work with presentation day on Tuesday, June 7! Students honed their presentation skills and built their confidence by presenting their learning not only to their peers and teachers, but also to community members who volunteered to join us for the event.

We celebrated student learning across disciplines with presentations in Calculus & Vectors, English, Perspectives, History, Art, Drama, Physics, Kinesiology, French Business, Data Management, World Cultures, and more! We are thankful for the teachers who empowered and prepared students, for the students who shared their perspectives and ideas, and for the parents who were an encouraging audience for student presentations.

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May 25, 2022

*By Anneke Gretton*

We learn for service in the light of God's Word by enfolding, engaging, and empowering students. During our May 6<sup>th</sup> and May 20<sup>th</sup> PD days, we focused our discussion on enfolding students of colour. Following a thoughtful introduction by Mr. Samuels, Mr Hayward shared our learning goal: to have meaningful discussions about respecting, honouring, and enfolding all students at TDChristian.

We learned about how schemas – cognitive shortcuts we use to process the information in the world around us – have the potential for harm when those schemas involve race. On May 6<sup>th</sup>, we studied three challenging scenarios in small groups regarding grading, discipline, and belonging. Teachers considered how we might make positive steps forward in each of these scenarios. We recognized that there are no quick fixes, but there is potential for growth.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, we dove into practical improvements we can make to our curriculum. After a former student shared positive experiences where teachers made her to feel seen and valued in their curricular choices, two teachers shared ways in which they have made strides in integrating diversity into their curriculum.

Next, we met in curricular groups (Phys Ed, Humanities, English, Science, Math, and Arts/Tech) to share resources. We shared specific resources, stories, activities, etc that you have discovered that have enabled teachers to teach a lesson or a unit through a lens of diversity and enfolding. Next, we discussed where we might find new resources for doing this important work better.

April 26, 2022

*By Anneke Gretton*

“I became a teacher because I want to be able to make students feel like they are seen and they are valued”, Rachel Petrusma tells me as we chat in the hallway where her students are busily engaged in a project.

We are blessed with a multitude of expert teachers at TDChristian who care deeply about their students. Today, we’re highlighting one of our new staff: Rachel Petrusma.

Rachel has a natural way of connecting with students and showing students that they matter – both to her and to God. Her passion for students has motivated her to dive into extracurriculars in her first year at TDChristian. Rachel has put countless hours into coaching both boys and girls volleyball, which she describes as a great way to build relationships and see a different side of students than she might usually see in the classroom.

When Rachel joined our team at TDChristian this year, she brought with her a wealth of experience and expertise. Rachel studied Physical Education and History with a minor in English at Redeemer University, and she completed her Bachelor of Education at Tyndale University. She has taught in both urban and rural Christian school settings – King’s Christian Collegiate in Oakville and Huron Christian School in Goderich, where she also served as a Vice Principal. Rachel also adventured West to teach at Vancouver Christian School!

Here at TDChristian, Rachel is sharing her expertise and passion for great Christian education as she serves on the Professional Development team. Rachel contributes her vision for professional development at TDChristian, and regularly leads aspects of our staff-wide PD. We are so blessed to have Rachel on the TDChristian team!

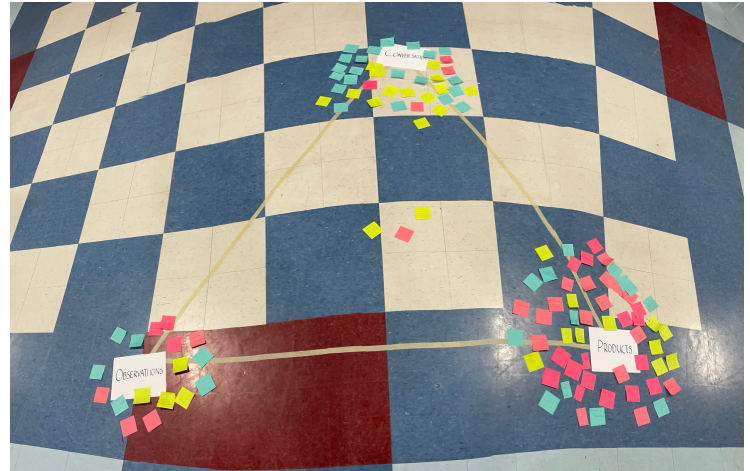
April 14, 2022  
By Anneke Gretton

During our second professional development day of semester two, we focused on improving our conversations for assessment. We started our PD with hearing student perspectives (in video form since the students were hard at work on their Period 2 projects) on how conversations have helped them demonstrate their learning.

Next, we mapped out our assessments as, of, and for learning into an assessment triangle: with conversations, observations, and products at the corners. This allowed us to zoom out to gain a bigger picture view of how students experience assessment on the whole at TDChristian.

Next, we looked at practical ways to integrate conversations into our assessments. Specifically, we looked at how to overcome the barrier of time: How do we make time and space in our classes to do conversations? We heard from multiple teachers who shared their strategies for overcoming this challenge.

Next, we looked at fair and transparent grading of conversation assessments. Four teachers shared their rubrics that they use in conversation assessments. Two of our teachers performed an excellent skit, acting out a conversation assessment so that teachers could have the opportunity to practice grading a conversation. Following the skit, teachers shared how they made grading decisions in small groups and discussed ways to refine their rubrics further.



March 30, 2022

By Anneke Gretton

At TDChristian, teachers employ a wide variety of research-based pedagogies to engage students. One of those pedagogies is the flipped classroom.

Mr. Hagen first started researching the flipped classroom when he was working on his master's in 2011. He was discussing the idea of using videos in math education with a classmate in his master's program. The classmate pointed Mr. Hagen to a book by the developers of the flipped classroom model, Aaron Sams and Jonathan Bergmann, and Mr. Hagen was sold.

As new technologies allowed him to improve his videos, Mr. Hagen has continued to refine his flipped math courses over the last decade. At the start of each unit, he provides students with all the materials they need. Students watch videos of Mr. Hagen explaining math concepts at home. This allows class time to be spent on the challenging part of learning: *making sense of those math concepts*. In class, students collaborate to practice problem-solving and applying the concepts they were introduced to in the videos. Mr. Hagen devotes his class time to helping students one-on-one or in small groups with specific areas of difficulty.

What makes this pedagogy so effective? For Mr. Hagen, he loves the freedom the flipped classroom provides. He's not tied to the front of the room, stuck lecturing every class period in order to "cover" the content. Instead, students watch that content at home, and class time can be spent more productively making sense of that content. "I can sit down with a student for 20 minutes to work on something", Mr. Hagen says. That gift of time for supporting students in a one-on-one setting is a huge blessing for students who struggle with math.

For students, a significant benefit of the flipped classroom approach is that they can learn at their own pace. Some students pick up math quickly: they can play Mr. Hagen's videos on 1.5x speed, and never feel bored. Other students, however, struggle with math and require multiple exposures to content. The video format allows students to slow things down and literally rewind and re-watch a tricky lesson.

Mr. Hagen has discovered that the flipped classroom provides a sense of peace and reduced anxiety, especially in his college and applied level courses. In math – a field that many students find stressful – we are so thankful that Mr. Hagen is giving students confidence in their ability to learn as he supports them through the flipped classroom model.

March 8, 2022  
*By Anneke Gretton*

Students dove into work on engaging projects for their first Project Day of semester two on Friday, March 4! Projects ranged from preparing presentations on the science underlying specific diseases to building musical instruments to creating a presentation centered on a metaphor that we can use to define ourselves.

Meanwhile, teachers met together for professional development! We followed up on the professional development session led by Syd Heilema on February 1<sup>st</sup> by sharing strategies and ideas for leading devotions in small groups. Since leading devotions is an outpouring of our own faith, we took time to share with colleagues where we are each at in our faith journeys and pray for each other.

Next, teachers choose one of three sessions:

- Motivating and Supporting Struggling Students, led by Michelle and Janice
- Project Based Learning, led by Anneke
- Using Course Feedback Surveys Effectively, led by Luke

Teachers expressed valuing this chance to work on specific areas of interest in smaller groups. We look forward to putting our PD into action as we support struggling students, create projects, and reflect on course feedback to improve as educators!

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February 22, 2022  
*By Anneke Gretton*

February is a great opportunity for us to honour the diverse students and staff at our school as we celebrate Black History Month. As we learn to see the image of God in each other, we work towards being the unified multi-ethnic family that God designed us to be. Celebrating Black History Month is one way that we work towards this goal.

Andrew Peterkin (School Therapist), Nate (Gr.9), and Immanuel (Gr.9) and Joel Dykxhoorn (VP) have worked hard to put together daily videos that highlight Black entrepreneurs, scientists, musicians, poets, athletes, authors, and more in our morning announcements.

Today, we got to learn from Black students at TDChristian in our assembly. Fiya Adenuga and Naomi Allman interviewed several Black students about their experiences at TDChristian, and put together an excellent video for our school to learn from. Andrew Peterkin (School Therapist) and Axel Kazadi (PhD student at University of Toronto & Assistant Professor of Theology) also shared their experiences in pursuing their careers and enduring loss in today's assembly.

We are thankful for the diverse community we get to be a part of and learn from at TDChristian. We look forward to seeing what we've learned during Black History Month shape our classes throughout the year.

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February 8, 2022  
*By Anneke Gretton*

There is a buzz of learning around the school as students dive into their semester two courses! I love the sense of hope and the fresh start that a new semester brings.

On February 1<sup>st</sup>, TDChristian welcomed Syd Heilema to lead us in professional development on teaching devotions. It was a life-giving day for many staff as we explored how our own faith has struggled and grown through the pandemic, and we considered how we can lead students in their faith journeys.

Syd is a former teacher (he taught at TDChristian before going on to become a professor at Dordt college and Redeemer University), and so he integrated pedagogical practices into his workshop, creating space for small group discussion and contemplative reflection.

Syd reminded us that devotions go far beyond five minutes during period 1. There is a whole classroom ecology that we need to create in order for students to feel safe, seen, and valued. Short connections in the hall, creating space for students to ask hard questions, and sharing our story are all ways to build this ecology.

Syd used varied repetition to reinforce key themes. One theme that stuck for many of us was the image of a large circle that represents all the wonderful ways a teacher can lead their class in devotions. On that giant circle is a little spot that represents the niche each teacher can fill. We were reminded that God gifted each of us with all that we need to lead meaningful devotions, but God didn't make us all the same. We each are finding our voice and our way of thoughtfully discipling students.

As Syd reminded us that God works through every one of us in different ways, we were empowered to lead our students well in devotions. I am excited to see how God works through our teachers in the lives of students this semester!

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January 25, 2022  
By Anneke Gretton

We are so grateful to be able to finish our first semester in person! It has been a joy to see all the great connections and learning happening in our building as students wrap up their courses with culminating activities.

This week, we're going to take a closer look one of the many programs that we're thankful to be able to do in person again – our STEM program! Mr. Godber teaches STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) for students in all grades at TDChristian.

Grade 9 students participate in STEM through our unique-to-TDChristian Grade 9 Block program, which introduces Grade 9 students to Drama, Music, Art, STEM, and Communications Technology. Mr. Godber meets the students where they are at, and he helps them advance their tech skills. For example, the Grade 9 students learned to use the Fusion 360 program to model chess pieces. Then they brought their designs to life with 3D printing!

Grade 10 STEM students progress from *following a plan* for building a desktop organizer and cutting board to *making a plan* for more projects like creating a passive speaker for their phone. Grade 11 and 12 students develop their skills further, building creative projects such as a ukulele, a vertical chess board, side tables, stacking saw horses, floating shelves, and a monopoly board!

We are thankful for Mr. Godber's leadership in our STEM program at TDChristian!

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January 10, 2022  
*By Anneke Gretton*

We are back to remote learning temporarily, with the plan of returning to in person classes on Monday, January 17. We are so thankful for the hard work of our tech team, Eric and Bruce Vrieling, who are providing teachers with all the training and tools they need to teach well remotely. We are grateful to the learning commons team, Janice DeBoer, Ryan Neville, and Michelle Jaworski, who are supporting students. And of course, we are so blessed by our team of awesome teachers who think outside the box to find ways to provide connection, care, and rich learning opportunities in the online setting. The switch to remote learning isn't easy, but we are so thankful for our great team as we continue to move forward in learning for service in the light of God's Word.

Students, remote learning is a good time to hone your independent learning skills. These are skills that will be useful to you throughout your life in future education and any career you pursue. How do you stay focused with all the distractions available to you on your computer?

Here's a few strategies to help:

1. Set a routine and stick to it. Without the structure of a school day, it's easy to let time slip away. But if you tackle your work during your scheduled class times, you'll be able to stay on top of things.
2. If you can, set aside a space in your house (like your desk) which you only use for school work. If possible, don't mix your school work space with your video game space or Netflix space. That way, when you sit down at your desk, the space itself will be a cue to your brain that this is time to focus.
3. Take active breaks. In between classes, don't stay on your computer. Get up and grab a healthy snack. Go for a walk outside during lunch break.
4. Stay connected to your school community. FaceTime with your friends.

Know that even in the isolation this pandemic has caused, God is always with you. Psalm 145 is a great psalm, and I'll share verse 18 here: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." We can't wait to see you in person again soon.

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December 6, 2021  
*By Anneke Gretton*

Teachers at TDChristian are always learning and improving our teaching and assessment. During our fourth and final project day (Friday, December 3), staff worked on improving our rubrics for assessment. Rubrics are a helpful assessment tool for making learning expectations transparent and specific, and for promoting a growth mindset around learning and achievement.

During our December 3<sup>rd</sup> professional development, staff looked at some of the complex research on assessment – highlighting its value, but also its challenges. Four teachers presented four rubrics: a task-specific rubric, an exemplar-focused rubric, a one-point rubric, and a learning progression rubric. We learned about why and how these four teachers use their different rubric styles.

We concluded our rubric session with a Tuning Protocol: Each teacher brought a rubric they are currently using to a team of four colleagues. After presenting the assessment along with its rubric to their colleagues,



teachers received feedback from colleagues on how to improve the rubric further. Just like the students at TDChristian, teachers never stop learning and fine-tuning our work!

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November 22, 2021

*By Anneke Gretton*

We are just over one week into our second half of semester one, and this means that many students are getting to try new fields of study! One of the unique features of our academic program at TDChristian are our shared courses that connect students to expert teachers, who are passionate about both students and their subject specializations.

Grade 9 Block is a wonderful opportunity for students to discover their gifts in Music, Improv, Visual Art, STEM, and Communications Technology. At this mid-semester time, most of our Grade 9 students dive into a new field in arts and technology, taught by passionate professionals who are experts in their fields. A small group of Grade 9s who love video technology will continue in a semester-long special technology course called the Pulse, where they create TDChristian's very own TV show! Check out the latest episode on our school's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM6nOWBwl6g>

A solid foundation in Mathematics is essential for students' future studies. Therefore, we schedule our Grade 9 Math course in two halves: Number, Algebra, Measurement, and Financial Literacy in semester 1, and Graphing, Data, and more Algebra in semester 2. This spreads our Grade 9 math course out over the full year, which increases students' retention and understanding of these foundational concepts.

Our Grade 9 and 10 Science courses also provide students the opportunity to connect with and learn from the talented teachers who will teach their Senior Science courses in Grade 11 and 12. Grade 9 and 10 Science students learn four strands: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Earth & Space Science from four teachers who specialize in their fields.

These unique course structures are only possible because of the culture of collaboration among TDChristian teachers. Our teachers regularly connect formally and informally to coordinate their courses and share resources. I'm so thankful for the generous and collaborative teaching culture we have at TDChristian!

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November 8, 2021

*By Anneke Gretton*

Just like our students, our staff are always learning! Professional development is important to us at TDChristian, and we use regular Project Days throughout the year to make space for Professional Development.

Our staff recently participated in the Edvance Annual Gathering on October 28<sup>th</sup>. We learned from Dr. David Smith on the theme of Education as Hospitality. The theme of hospitality – God as a banquet host, Christ welcoming the stranger – is woven throughout scripture. In our PD time, we considered how Christian Education can be an act of hospitality to students. We learned about teaching practices that help students of all backgrounds feel welcome in our classes.

On October 29<sup>th</sup>, our staff participated in school-wide professional development on the theme of Mental Wellness. We learned from our school therapist, Andrew Peterkin, about how to recognize struggles with mental illness in students and ourselves, and how to find support. We also learned practices that we can use in our classrooms for students and for ourselves to promote mental wellness. We wrapped up our professional development by participating in a wellness activity.

We are looking forward to our next project day, November 10<sup>th</sup>, when we will be focusing on items from the strategic plan and celebrating staff milestones.

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October 25, 2021

*By Anneke Gretton*

Our second Project Day is coming up on Thursday, October 28! This Thursday, students will be working from home on a project designed to deepen their learning in their period 2 class.

Why do we have Project Days?

Project Days are a great chance for students to dive into an interesting and challenging topic to enrich their learning. At TDChristian, we strive to create projects that highlight students' voice and empower students to make choices about how to focus and share their learning.

Project Days also provide space for our staff to participate in professional development activities. This week, teachers will be learning about Education as Hospitality from Dr. David Smith at the Edvance Annual Gathering on Thursday, October 28. On Friday, October 29, the TDChristian staff will be working with our school therapist, Andrew Peterkin, to further our understanding of how to support students and each other with regards to mental health.

Every semester, there will be four Project Days – one for each of the four class periods. The next two Project Days will be on Wednesday, November 10 (for your Period 3 class) and Friday, December 3 (for your Period 4 class).

Enjoy learning on your Project Day this Thursday!

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October 12, 2021  
*By Anneke Gretton*

We are excited to host you in person at TDChristian for Learning Dialogues this week! Students and their parents will meet with teachers in several classrooms and the Presentation Center this Thursday, October 14 from 3:00 – 8:00pm. We encourage students to attend Learning Dialogues with their parents.

If you haven't scheduled your learning dialogues yet, you can do so up until Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup> at noon. Here's what to do:

1. Go to [schoolinterviews.ca](https://schoolinterviews.ca)
2. Click on the "Make a Booking" link near the top right
3. Enter the code j95zg
4. Follow the instructions: for each child, you may book up to eight Learning Dialogues, though four is the normal number for most students.

Learning Dialogues are a wonderful opportunity to work as a team – teachers, parents, and students – to make a plan for students' learning and growth at TDChristian. We are really looking forward to meeting with you this Thursday!

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Sept 14, 2021  
*By Anneke Gretton*

Thank you for welcoming me to the TDChristian community! My role as Vice Principal of Learning includes leading our professional development plan and visioning new directions for learning at TDChristian in collaboration with our awesome staff.

We are thrilled to return to in-person learning at TDChristian this year! We reimagined the daily schedule for 2021-22 with these goals in mind:

- To enable deeper student learning
- To encourage flourishing in all aspects of life: spiritual, social, academic, athletic, and more
- To empower teachers to do their best work
- To facilitate safety in a sustainable way with respect to COVID-19

Our new daily schedule includes three club periods per week to encourage students to build friendships while pursuing their passions with like-minded peers and teachers.

Research-based teaching tools like the flipped classroom and other techniques apply a blended model of teaching: balancing frequent in-person learning with asynchronous learning. We've incorporated asynchronous learning into our schedule (averaging 10 minutes per weekday per class) to complement the rich learning that happens in class at TDChristian. Students will be supported by their teachers to excel in both their asynchronous and in-person learning activities.

You can find the details of our new schedule in the Family & Student Handbook. You are also welcome and encouraged to connect with me if you have any questions. I look forward to getting to know you this year!