

Notebook

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Grade 10 student experiences world class science on Arctic excursion

Certain standard images come to mind when we are asked to picture the average grade 10 science project. Most of them involve Bunsen burners, test tubes, Bristol board, charts and graphs.

Helicopters, glaciers, fjords and time aboard the only working research vessel in the world may seem more appropriate for a James Bond movie or an adventure novel.

But Rebeccah Sandrelli, a grade 10 student at Bishop Smith Catholic High School in Pembroke, was invited to practise her scientific research skills in Canada's far north in November.

Rebeccah was chosen from a field of more than 500 candidates to be one of 10 participants in "Schools on Board", a national outreach program designed to combine Arctic research with high school science education.

She worked with university-level researchers under the leadership of Dr. Sam Bentley of Memorial University in Newfoundland. They spent 12 days aboard the Canadian Coast Guard Service Amundsen, traveling through the Hudson Strait and along the coast of Northern Labrador.

"It was absolutely beautiful," Rebeccah recalls, referring to the four fjords, two glaciers and other sites she saw.

But the trip focused on more than the sight-seeing opportunities. Rebeccah found herself working until 2 a.m., up to her elbows in muck, sorting samples collected from the ocean's floor—hosing down the mud to sort and classify organisms such as crabs and shrimp. Soft tissue samples were collected for analysis back in the university labs, where contaminants such as mercury will be identified and measured.

Rebeccah and the nine other high school students on board the Amundsen had the privilege of working side-by-side with scientists who are working at the Master's or PhD level.

For the Bishop Smith student, it was a chance to see a glimpse of her future.

"That's what I want to do," she says, adding "It was a bit of an eye-opener."

For one thing, Rebeccah was surprised by the varied interests of the other "Schools on Board" participants. While she expected to share the experience with fellow science buffs, she found herself surrounded by peers interested in politics, the controversies surrounding

sovereignty in the Arctic Circle, engineering and the mechanics of the ship's machinery, Aboriginal history, and a realm of other aspects of the trip.

Together, they had the opportunity to go on shore and explore the remnants of two communities that had been abandoned as part of government relocation programs. They marked November 11 with special ceremonies at a community that was desolated by the Spanish flu in 1918.

"It was all very interesting," Rebeccah states, explaining that she was especially inspired by the prospects of working independently as a scientist, taking advantage of unexpected opportunities that arise, just like "Schools on Board".

As she shares her experiences through class presentations for her peers and workshops at local elementary schools, Rebeccah stresses one key point.

"Get out into the world and pursue your dreams," she tells them. "You never know where they might take you!"



Rebeccah Sandrelli was not shy about digging into the muck for a true hands-on scientific experience aboard an Arctic research vessel this fall.

A message from the Director of Education

This issue of *Notebook* focuses on student engagement in our schools.

I am particularly pleased to provide these examples of how our students are taking ownership of their educational experiences.

You will find stories that take us from our own school playgrounds to the Ministry of Education boardrooms in Toronto and as far as once-in-a-lifetime adventures on the Arctic seas.

When it comes to following their interests and pursuing their dreams, our students know no bounds!

What an exciting world they have created! They thrive on daily opportunities to connect globally. Internet resources give

them deep understanding and compassion for those who live in places like Haiti. They are inspired to investigate new developments in science and technology. They are encouraged to explore the aesthetic value of earth's rich arts and delve into history.

Most importantly, our students are taught to put a Catholic lens on everything they do, and to be guided by Jesus as they anticipate the wonderful possibilities of the future they will help create.

Student engagement is an inspiring notion. You can't help but catch the spirit and enthusiasm it creates!

Michele Arbour
Director of Education

Message from the Diocese

The Parish: Our Spiritual Home

By Father Ryan Holly

A few days after Christmas, an article appeared in an Ottawa newspaper about the closure of a parish in a neighboring diocese. A once thriving parish, the numbers had declined so rapidly that it was no longer a viable community. The article spoke of how at this final Mass the church building was packed with parishioners who had come out in large numbers for this sad occasion. One faithful parishioner interviewed made a chilling statement, "all these people are here with their young children today, but where have they been? Perhaps if they had stayed coming to Mass our church wouldn't be closing." My heart sank when I read the article because our parishes are so much a part of our spiritual identity. They are not only the places where we are nourished by the sacraments, but the parish is our spiritual home. It is where we experience the universal Church in our own backyard. What the statement of the parishioner really spoke to was the responsibility that each and every member of the

community has to be present in the life of the parish, primarily at Sunday Mass. Our parishes have a place in our spiritual memory because we associate them with the important moments of life—the celebration of the sacraments, our celebrations of birth, death, joy, sorrow and everything in between. Perhaps it is because our parishes play such a key role in our spiritual memory that we just always expect them to be there when we need them. The reality of the matter is that if we are not present, active and engaged on a weekly basis we are spiritually depriving ourselves, but the community of faith also suffers in real and tangible ways. Our link to our parish community cannot be merely through family ties or historical connection, but it must be our own, alive and frequent. Blessed Pope John XXIII once said, "we are not here on earth to guard a museum, but to tend to a flourishing garden of life." If our parishes are going to be places of spiritual and demographic strength, we must make the decision to be present and thereby see the mystical Body of Christ flourish in our midst.

Advisory council gives students a provincial forum



Natalie, left, with a fellow council member.

Natalie Beauchamp is in the unique position of being a grade 10 student who can honestly say she's had the ear of the Minister of Education. Last spring, Natalie was chosen from a field of 5,000 applicants to be one of 60 members of the Minister of Education's Student Advisory Council.

"It involved a lot of talking," she says, explaining that she attended a meeting in Toronto last May as well as a four-day summer camp where participants

shared their thoughts in group sessions as well as one-on-one discussions with the Minister of Education and her staff.

"I've proven something to myself," Natalie says. "I can go beyond my limits and I can speak up."

The experience has helped the grade 10 student establish both short-term and long-term goals for herself. She is already making plans for the summer of 2011, when she hopes to be a youth facilitator at the Ontario Educational Leadership Centre on Lake Couchiching near Orillia, where this year's summer camp was held.

Further down the road, Natalie has set her sites on a legal career.

"I know how to argue a point," she says. "This experience has taught me to back up my opinions and to really think things through before I speak up."

Our Mission Statement

Inspired by our rich heritage and challenged by the struggles of our past, we are an inclusive Catholic educational community called to express our mission as Church to pass on the Good News of Jesus Christ, to make it relevant in the world today, and to be the hope for the future.

Student trustees add a practical and personal perspective to board discussions

Ashley Stroud

As student trustee for St. Joseph's High School in Renfrew, Ashley Stroud has been actively providing the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board with insights from those who matter most—the students themselves.

The grade 12 student was inspired to run for the position by her grandmother, who happens to be RCCDSB Trustee Anne Smith.

Two years later, Ashley is happy she listened to her grandma, because seeing the inner workings of the school board system has been an invaluable experience.

"When you are a student, everything seems so black and white," Ashley comments, noting that now she understands that there are many "grey areas" that need to be discussed regarding each issue.

The position has also provided her with many opportunities to attend conferences across the province, including one early in her tenure that focused on preserving Catholic education.

"I feel I've gained a lot from being in the Catholic school system, and one thing it's done is strengthened my faith, and that conference strengthened it even more," Ashley states.

After graduation, she intends to pursue post-secondary education in pharmacy. Once that is accomplished and she settles down, Ashley foresees a future that could include running for a trustee position.



Katie Brooks

When Katie Brooks attended her first meeting of the board last spring, she was a bit overwhelmed with the bulging binders of background information, the formality of the agendas and meeting procedures and the various processes.

"Then you catch on," she says, describing the new level of understanding she has gained about the work and discussions that go into getting things done and instituting change.

Katie is thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to voice her opinions and report to her fellow board members about the activities and programs at Bishop Smith Catholic High School in Pembroke, where she is a grade 11 student.

"I've always liked to stand up for what I believe in," says the student trustee who also happens to be co-vice-president of the student athletic council and a member of the leadership committee with a 90% average and a couple of part-time jobs.

"I like being out there and standing up for the students," she says, adding that she feels very welcomed by her fellow board members.

Katie also admits that her experiences as a student trustee could provide a good foundation for a future political career. "It's always an option I'm keeping open," she says.



PALs promote fun, friendship and activity on the playground

Ultimate Polar Bear, Tug-O-War Rope Tow, Freeze and Thaw Tag, Soccer Baseball. A team of keen student leaders at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Renfrew are sharing the joy of cooperative games with their peers on a regular basis.

They are leading the school's new Playground Activity Leadership (PAL) program.

Safe Schools Special Assignment Teacher Cheryl Spotswood explains that there are three key components to the program: "to reduce playground bullying, foster more physical activity on the playground, and develop leadership skills."

Many of the activities are cooperative games that follow the PAL motto: "There's always room for one more."

Spotswood has fellow teachers Dan St. Michael and Erin Welch, plus parent supervisor Kinga MacAskill assigned to three teams with the student PALs. Each team is in charge of organizing one activity per week.

MacAskill is thrilled to see such a beneficial program in action at her children's school, and says she has noticed that children are behaving better during their recess time.

Grade 5 student Chelsea Bernard says that, on top of gaining valuable leadership skills, she's learning a lot about other kids in the school outside her regular play circle.

Many of the PALs say they also see budding friendships evolving from the games they're playing.

Delaney Leavoy, who's in Grade 4 says if she sees anyone misbehaving she now goes over to them and asks if they'd like to join in the games.

The PAL program is made possible through a partnership with the Renfrew County and District Health Unit.



The PALs team at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School includes 16 students from Grades 4 to 7 who organize and lead playground activities.

New technology leads to new levels of student interest

E-mail, internet forums and instant messaging are not new concepts to most computer-savvy grade 7 students, but at selected Catholic schools in the region, they have now been introduced as a welcome part of the curriculum.

Amanda Yarascavitch's students at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic School in Renfrew have been taking part in a pilot project which couples traditional teaching practices with online technology.

She describes it as a virtual classroom website, complete with a handy homework list for quick reference posted in the news section, a "locker" for saving assignments and noteworthy website links, and a discussion area.

The concept is designed to provide more opportunities for independent learning since assignments can be started at school, saved to the locker and finished up at home.

From a teacher's perspective, the discussion area has been particularly eye-opening.

"A lot of the students who wouldn't normally respond in class are posting their questions and input on this board," says Yarascavitch. "It's neat to see whole conversations happening between kids who don't regularly talk to each other."

Twelve-year-old Shaedon Donaghy especially likes the ability to check his homework at home.

"I can always go on and find out what it is if I forgot to write it down," he says.

His classmate, Dane Brumm, likes the fact that he can get help after school hours.

"I think it's beneficial to use the classroom discussion feature and then be able to chat with everyone about the work," says 12-year-old Emma Crozier.

Yarascavitch checks the board in the evenings to answer questions and monitor who is in the cyber classroom and which pages they visit.

Since it is designed as a "safe site," only the class has access to see who's on the system. Yarascavitch explains that there



Adam Wright, Dane Brumm and Will Vincent visit their virtual classroom with Teacher Amanda Yarascavitch.

are no e-mail addresses involved. Students contact each other by clicking on their name and sending instant messages.

Parents have also commented on how they enjoy being able to go online and check what homework their child should be doing.

Only a couple months into the project, Yarascavitch isn't looking back.

"I can't imagine not having this next year," she comments. "I'd feel lost."

Student councils combine responsibility and fun

One of the most visible forms of student engagement is the leadership role taken on by members of the student councils.

St. John Bosco Catholic School in Barry's Bay has a dynamic group of leaders who are very eager to organize fun events, fund-raise for community initiatives and look for ways to help those less fortunate.

"The student council students take their jobs as leaders within the school very seriously," reports Kelly Etmanskie, one of their teacher advisors.

"They work hard to make school an inviting, fun place for everyone."

We asked the student council members to share their thoughts about their roles and responsibilities as school leaders. Here's some of what they had to say:

- Being on student council, I have learned that you have to be committed to your role.
- You have to respect the other members you are working with.

- I am now more responsible in school and at home, thanks to student council.
- A school council can organize social activities for the whole school.
- A student council does not run the school, but they help out the school in different ways.
- A student council can raise money for good causes, and have fun doing it.
- As members of student council, our job is to work together to make this a fun school year for everyone.
- Every few weeks the whole student council comes together and puts their ideas together to plan something new and exciting!

Hats off to the student council members at St. John Bosco: Cory Kluge, Brandon Olsheskie, Brittany Olsheskie, Melanie Plebon, Elizabeth Reid, Kaitlyn Olsheskie, Joey Pecarski, Jamie Manion and Allison McRae... and to their peers in Catholic schools throughout Renfrew County!