

PILLAR: Gifted Affective Learning



Westmount Charter School has employed the use of affective curriculum very successfully. Gifted students are often prone to be hyper critical and have many perfectionist issues. With the use of an affective curriculum, interwoven into all aspects of the school community these children are allowed to explore their special gifts in a safe and nurturing environment. It has promoted the feeling of the “Westmount Family”.

A key element underpinning all our work at Westmount is to understand the role that the affect plays in engaging/enhancing the cognitive processes of our students, and programming to maximize this engagement and enhancement. Intentionally incorporating positive affective considerations in daily classroom experiences will contribute to achievement and well-being. This contributes positively to self-esteem and self-concept which, in turn, influences achievement.

Important to educators in a gifted setting is to move from a reactive to a proactive paradigm in our response to what we understand as the social emotional experience of gifted learners. For example, knowing that many gifted students struggle with “failure,” rather than supporting students in perceived failures after the fact, creating guided and supported failure experiences that help students understand, manage and plan for difficult situations.

The affective domain does not exist in isolation. Understanding the role of each of the other pillars in contributing to the affective experience of gifted students, such as nutrition and physical activity, helps students, parents and teachers to work in partnership to create the best possible learning experience for the child.

PILLAR: Gifted Social Responsibility



The social responsibility pillar takes many forms at Westmount. In the younger grades events such as the Terry Fox Run and UNICEF are promoted. By mid-school some of the students have taken on causes on their own; in September of 2011, for example, some 25 students had their heads shaved as a fundraiser for cancer research. The Gifted Ed high school diploma at Westmount encourages and acknowledges both volunteer hours in school and out in the community. Clubs such as Interact flourish, and the Grade 11 and 12 trip to Peru has a global volunteer focus.

The “interior life” of the gifted student is often both rich and intense. At Westmount, then, moving students to greater engagement in the world beyond themselves is an ongoing challenge, including:

- ❖ facilitating the emergence and/or continuous development of awareness of contexts and needs outside of one’s own immediate context,
- ❖ exploring with students how to channel this awareness into meaningful engagement towards solutions aimed at reasonably meeting needs outside of one’s own context, and
- ❖ considering how one makes a positive contribution to one’s society through both effective leadership and followership,
- ❖ presenting students with collaborative/team building activities, and opportunities for direct volunteer involvement with social agencies, to help students understand the importance of being active citizens.

PILLAR: Gifted Health and Wellness



Our ability to act on the Health and Wellness pillar has been greatly improved by our recent move of facility locations. The students in K-Gr 4 can now play freely outdoors before the beginning of the school day. Access to the playground has improved and the attendance of some organized sports leagues during lunch has increased. For our grade 5-12 campus we now have the ability to control the types of foods being offered to our students on-campus.

Westmount is promoting comprehensive school health initiatives and programming, as indicated in the national strategy of the [Joint Consortium for School Health](#). The Alberta Coalition for Healthy School Communities ([ACHSC](#)) also guides our practice, of engendering positive social community, modeling and practicing healthy eating, and participating regularly in physical activity.

Recent provincial data ([REAL Kids Alberta, 2008](#)), indicates substantially more overweight or obese children than estimates from earlier studies. In addition, the majority of children are not meeting Canada's Food Guide recommendations and/or are not physically active enough. Westmount has collected verifying evidence that relates to above-mentioned provincial data.

The factor that creates a magnified problem for Westmount lies in the fact that we service gifted learners, many of whom already develop in an asynchronous manner. This asynchronous factor can often create a particular vulnerability from a health and wellness perspective. Our ultimate goal is to facilitate the development of healthy and happy citizen, however we also hope to develop graduates healthy enough to embark upon solving society's future challenges. Therefore, there is great concern for the unhealthy gifted student for both ethical and societal reasons.

PILLAR: Gifted Academic



It is a common misbelief that the gifted learner is automatically a high achieving student. At Westmount the teaching staff is well aware that our learners come in many forms. Inquiry based learning helps each student to display their knowledge of a subject in a meaningful manner. The use of simulations allows each of the students to experience the learning at a level that traditional teaching does not.

Westmount strives to understand the academic needs of our gifted students. Pace, content and delivery all need to be considered in this diverse group of learners. As such, a regular review of current pedagogy in teaching and learning for gifted students, and its implementation, is ongoing. The school's relationships with gifted organizations, with the [College of William and Mary](#), and with the network of presenters from our first "[Pillars of Gifted Education](#)" conference (fall 2010) assist us in this ongoing review.

In the elementary grades, students are re-grouped in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics, based on teacher recommendations and pre/post assessment measure. The intention of this is to facilitate student learning at levels appropriate to demonstrated mastery of skills, concepts and levels of readiness (Emergent, Grade Level, Enriched and Accelerated). It is also meant to avoid the frustration common to gifted learners who are compelled to follow a lock-step grade model.

Particularly in High School years, a regular review of the courses offered and consideration of additional / replacement complementary courses is essential. Questions to consider are, "do the courses offered meet the learning and interest needs of our students?" and, "are we able to effectively implement these?"

Westmount ensures that students experience successful learning at all levels as demonstrated through standardized testing (PAT, Diplomas) and through stakeholder evaluations (parent/ teacher/ student/ alumni surveys). A tremendous advantage of being a K-12 program is the opportunity this affords us to address academic concerns at all levels: gaps or "soft spots" in curriculum delivery are addressed systemically, and individual students' learning styles are well-understood.