



by Johanna Bambridge
Elementary School Principal

Elementary students at St. John's can be guaranteed of many things, but one thing is for sure:

Each child will receive a St. John's lion upon leaving to remind them of who they have become!

As principal of this wonderful school, it is my pleasure to present the St. John's lion to each child who leaves our school and embarks on another phase of their learning. This ceremony often finds me choking back words and wiping away tears, as well. It never fails to cause my heart to fill with love for our "courageous children" as they leave our shores for big adventures, and it never fails to make me reflect on what I really hope each child will take with them to their new place.

What do I hope our students will take away from their time with us? The answer is more than a souvenir of a lion!

As a Primary Years Programme (PYP) school, St. John's Elementary School is strongly committed to developing international-mindedness in all our programs and units of study, which in turn, affects the way our students interact with their peers, school community and the outside world. International-

mindedness is not easy to define, however; so we, as educators, have relied on evidence from the actions and attitudes of our international students, over time, to discover what this really means. These attributes have been collected and are referred to as The Learner Profile for PYP communities around the world. The Learner Profile is central to St. John's Elementary School and permeates and focuses the learning that takes place, as well as helps create the environment for that to happen. The attributes described are appropriate and achievable by all primary years students. Our Elementary teachers recognize these Learner Profiles as the real learning outcomes for our educational program. It is the hope of the entire Elementary team that students learn more than just textbook knowledge while attending St. John's. Let me discuss some of them here for you.

Children are born with a natural curiosity, and as they grow, they begin to realize that they are responsible for acquiring the answers they seek. At St. John's, this "wondering" translates to how all units of inquiries begin. Teachers encourage the students to bring and share past experiences, backgrounds and prior knowledge with one another. Often, classroom walls are covered with student questions

raised during the introduction of a unit of study. PYP students often share their questions through discussion with their team members in a sharing activity. As the exploring continues, students often find that being an "inquirer" results in more questions being added to the list. St. John's students, in turn, are guided as on how to research the answers through practical work in the ICT lab and the Library Resource Centre.

"Knowledgeable" PYP students are exposed to learning in a very broad and balanced way. For example, a particular grade level exploring an ancient civilization certainly will not rely strictly on textbook reading. Instead, the students may explore the making and eating of typical food, create a reproduction of jewelry worn by the women of that culture, learn a dance or play an instrument from that civilization, invite a guest speaker who may bring artifacts for the children to touch and handle, as well as visit a museum as part of their exploration. The concepts, ideas and issues raised during the unit have local and global significance for the students and may lead a group of students to share what they have discovered with other students through an assembly, performing a play, printing a book, or reading a poem.



While gathering data to broaden their knowledge, our students exercise thinking skills, looking at problems with a creative and critical eye. These young “thinkers” tackle big problems and take into account different opinions and beliefs. Recently, the children in Grade 3, at our school, looked at the similarities and differences of the major world religions and exhibited their findings for the school community in an open house session, where they expressed their ideas and information confidently and creatively, as well. These “communicators” willingly delivered their findings in a variety of ways. Meanwhile, the Grade 1 students at St. John’s explored “Patterns in our World,” searching for the natural and man-made patterns in nature and discovered that patterns are even found in the gymnasium while exercising!

Because our students are a vital part of the international community, these children begin to develop a sense of fairness, justice and respect for the individual, group and other communities. As “principled and caring” young people, they show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. The St. John’s fourth graders challenge themselves each year to increase the monies raised for MALA, an organization which supports

Indian women and children to be self sufficient. By visiting the local MALA warehouse, promoting gift shopping at the warehouse to the parent community, and coordinating fund raisers throughout the year, these “open minded” students are also understanding and appreciating the values and traditions of other world communities.

Learning at our school sometimes involves “stepping out of the comfort zone,” too. From the moment a child walks through the front doors of our school and meets his newly assigned “buddy,” he has already proved his courage. Soon, these youngsters begin to develop a spirit of independence—from the child who asks to read her poem over the intercom for the entire school to hear, to the non-native English speaker who sings a solo at a Thursday morning sharing assembly. This is being brave and stepping out of the box, for sure. These are the “risk-takers”—small in size now, but soon to make larger impacts in the world.

What do I hope each student will take away from their time with us? By asking this question, I am modeling one of the most important profiles on the list—that of being “reflective.” True growth can only happen by looking back and giving consideration to your own learning and experiences.

By understanding what I want my students to take away with them, it forces me to assess how our school is doing against these standards. As the principal of the school, I am responsible for ensuring that we are working to achieve these learning outcomes for all students. This works the same way for maturing students. Our youngsters experience setting goals, putting together action plans, recognizing failure and then celebrating success—all part of life—as part of the learning process, while participating in peer assessment activities, evaluating their personal performance and preparing for portfolio conferences.

As I mentally prepare myself to accept my own daughter’s graduation from St. John’s, I have come to realize the answer to my own questions. I wish for each child exactly what I wish for my own daughter—to be truly happy and secure—and have a truly “balanced” life. As she and all our St. John’s students continue to mature, may they develop a personal set of values by which to live. This won’t be an easy task so I remind each child as I hand them the lion, “Hug it tight whenever you need to be reminded about this place, whenever you need a little courage. You are on your way to becoming the future.”