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FORUM



Just beneath the surface

Stephen Lewis Secondary School
art exhibit on mental health

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Contents

36



PHOTO: ELEANOR ALEXANDER

Columns

9 We all belong/Tous du même bord

By/par Kenji Takahashi
and/et Julia Maltby

11 Service learning as a teacher candidate

By Rob Murison

13 Teen dystopia

By Sophie Boyer

Features

16 Born in tumult, now a pension giant

By Larry French

20 Just beneath the surface/ Sous la surface

By/par Amie Tolton

26 Moments of startling clarity

By Dr. Stephen L. Anderson

30 Consumerism and education/ Mercantilisme et éducation

By/par Chris Glover

Departments

5 Openers/Mot de l'éditrice

By/par Wendy Anes Hirschegger

36 Stills

By Eleanor Alexander

38 Beyond the classroom

By Ronda Allan

40 Forum picks

45 Last word/Mot de la fin

By/par Ken Coran

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The “education team”

More critical than ever

Among the proliferation of news stories about the recent provincial election, in the second and third weeks of September there were also several news reports from the Mississauga and Greater Toronto Area about two very sad deaths. On Friday, September 16, the body of a 17-year-old female student was found in a park in Mississauga and, a few blocks away, a 16-year-old male student fell from the Mavis Road overpass onto Highway 407; several days later, he died of his injuries. As it turns out, these two deaths are connected; the young man had killed the young woman and then jumped from the overpass to commit suicide.

Understandably, those who knew these two students are distraught and are trying to cope with these two untimely and unnecessary deaths. The news stories indicate that the young man had wanted to be romantically involved with the young woman, but that the young woman just wanted to be friends. As a result, the young man was depressed and appears to have taken drastic and fatal measures to deal with his anguish.

Mental health issues are not at all well understood and OSSTF/FEESO has long advocated for increased personnel and resources to be made available to help the school system cope with those who are struggling with them. The 2008 research report *Enhancing Services: Enhancing Success* states, “Growing recognition that some school aged children and youth require assistance to cope has prompted educators to implement programs targeting social, emotional, relationship, mental health, behaviour and self esteem issues.” The report goes on to say, “Schools are a natural setting for supporting students’ needs because schools are where children spend most of each day....First, the availability of community

based services is declining and secondly, that school based, rather than clinic based treatments have a far greater rate of success.” As such, OSSTF/FEESO champions the “education team” approach to

“...an event where
the power of our
collective voices,
commitment
and efforts
can bring a
sense of urgency
and action to
the vital issue
of mental health.”

meeting student needs and improving student success through the provision of services by school board employed professionals such as psychologists, social workers and speech and language pathologists, and many others.

More recently, the Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health, of which OSSTF/FEESO is one inaugural member, held a Summit on Children and Youth Mental Health in Toronto last June. It was “...designed as an event where the power of our collective voices, commitment and efforts can bring a sense

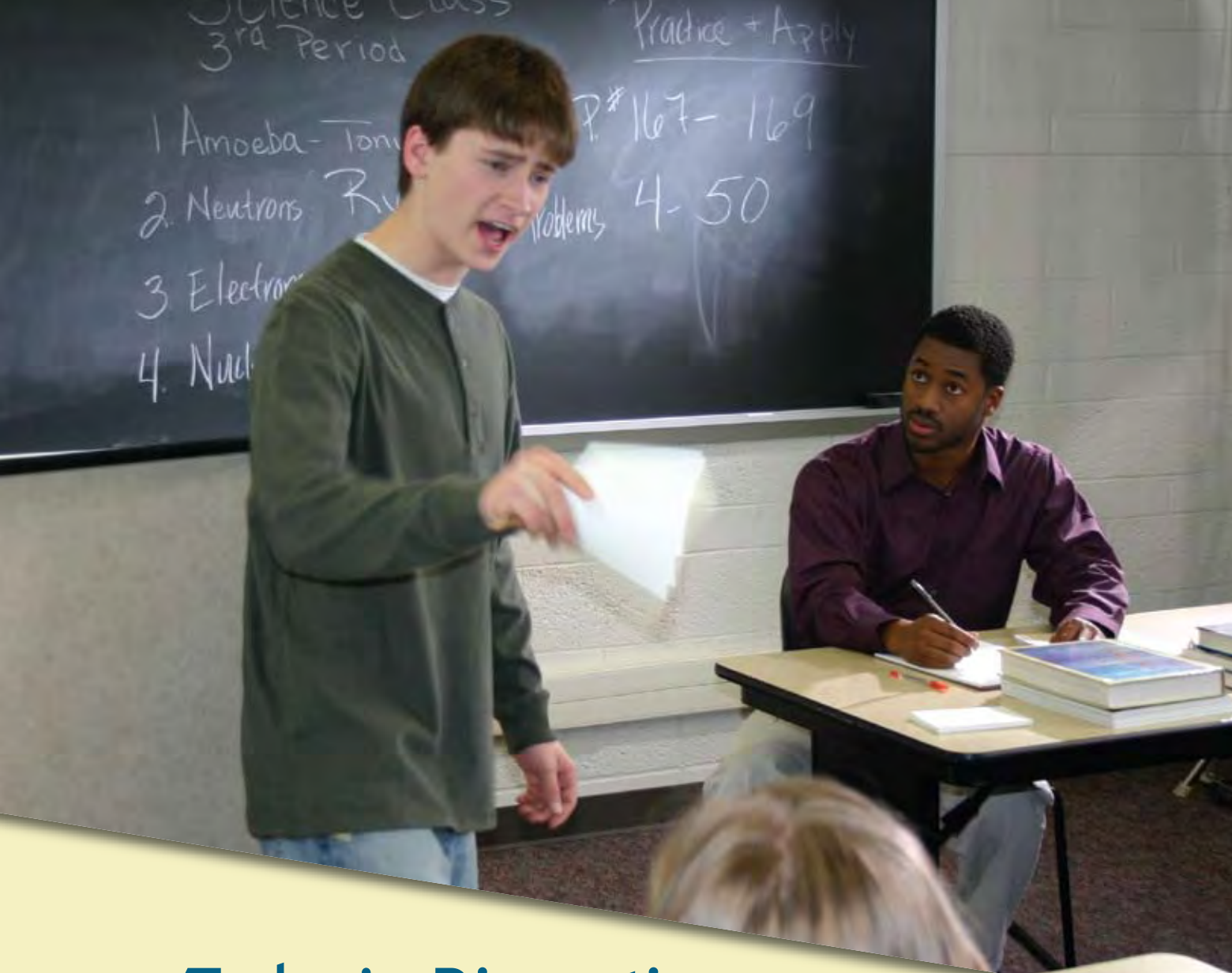
of urgency and action to the vital issue of mental health.”

Clearly though, as the sad events of early September described earlier illustrate, the work in this area is far from done and so, to highlight mental health issues, I chose Amie Tolton’s article “Just beneath the surface” as the cover story for this edition of *Education Forum*. In this article, Tolton describes how her photography class created an art exhibit that explores mental health disorders through student art. The powerful photographs and their accompanying stories were some of the student voices at the Summit on Children and Youth Mental Health and they speak eloquently of the despair that some students are experiencing. Tolton’s article is a poignant reminder that we must work together to try to understand and then to address the mental health issues among our students.

Another important issue in the education world is that of pensions. Larry French’s article “Born in tumult, now a pension giant” chronicles the history of the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan (OTPP), which celebrates its 20th anniversary on December 19 this year. From its modest early roots in its previous incarnation to its current status, French highlights the struggle in the late 1980s that created the pension partnership and the terms that have made the OTPP what it is today. The article also serves to underline that, recent valuation issues notwithstanding, had the OTPP not been created, the circumstances for current and prospective retirees alike would be dire indeed.

The remainder of the articles in this issue cover a wide range of other interesting topics such as commercialization in schools, character education and service learning, to name a few. Once again, the editorial team and I hope that you will find the issue informative and thought-provoking. ☺





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« L'équipe scolaire »

Plus cruciale que jamais

Parmi la grande quantité de reportages sur les récentes élections provinciales, durant la deuxième et la troisième semaine de septembre, il y a eu plusieurs nouvelles de la région de Mississauga et du Grand Toronto au sujet de deux décès bien tristes. Le vendredi 16 septembre, le corps d'une élève de 17 ans a été retrouvé dans un parc à Mississauga et, à quelques rues de là, un élève de 16 ans est tombé du pont de la rue Mavis sur l'autoroute 407. Il est décédé de ses blessures plusieurs jours plus tard. En fin de compte, ces deux morts sont liées. Le jeune homme a tué la jeune femme et a ensuite sauté du pont pour commettre un suicide.

Naturellement, ceux qui connaissaient ces deux élèves sont désespérés et tentent de faire face à ces deux décès prématurés et inutiles. Les reportages indiquent que le jeune homme voulait avoir des relations amoureuses avec la jeune femme, mais elle voulait seulement qu'ils soient amis. Pour cette raison, le jeune homme était déprimé et il semble avoir pris des mesures radicales et fatales pour apaiser son immense douleur.

Les problèmes de santé mentale ne sont pas tous bien compris et OSSTF/FEESO préconise depuis longtemps l'ajout de personnel et de ressources pour aider le système scolaire à s'occuper de ceux qui y sont confrontés. Le rapport de recherche de 2008 intitulé *Enhancing Services: Enhancing Success* indique « Il est de plus en plus admis que certains enfants et jeunes d'âge scolaire ont besoin d'aide pour s'en sortir, ce qui a incité les éducateurs à mettre en œuvre des programmes qui ciblent les problèmes sociaux, affectifs, relationnels, comportementaux, de santé mentale et d'estime de soi. » Le rapport poursuit en disant « Les écoles sont un cadre naturel pour répondre aux besoins des élèves, car c'est à l'école que les enfants passent le plus clair de leurs journées... Tout d'abord, la

disponibilité des services communautaires diminue et, en deuxième lieu, les traitements en milieu scolaire, plutôt que ceux en clinique, ont un taux de succès plus élevé. » À ce titre, OSSTF/FEESO soutient

«... conçu comme une
activité où la force de
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et d'action dans ce
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la santé mentale. »

l'approche de « l'équipe scolaire » pour répondre aux besoins et pour améliorer la réussite des élèves grâce à la prestation de services par des employés professionnels des conseils scolaires comme les psychologues, les travailleuses et travailleurs sociaux, les orthophonistes et plusieurs autres.

Tout dernièrement, la Coalition pour la santé mentale des enfants et des adolescents, à laquelle OSSTF/FEESO est l'un des membres fondateurs, a organisé un Sommet sur la santé mentale des enfants et des adolescents à Toronto en juin dernier. Il était « ... conçu comme une activité où la force de nos voix collectives, l'engagement et les efforts peuvent susciter un sentiment d'urgence et d'action dans ce dossier primordial de la santé mentale. »

De toute évidence, comme le montrent les tristes événements du début septembre, le travail dans ce domaine est loin d'être

terminé et aussi pour souligner les problèmes de santé mentale, j'ai choisi l'article d'Amie Tolton « *Sous la surface* » pour être l'article-vedette de ce numéro d'*Education Forum*. Dans son article, Amie Tolton décrit comment sa classe de photographie a mis sur pied une exposition d'arts qui se penche sur les troubles de santé mentale à travers l'art des élèves. Les photographies émouvantes et les histoires s'y rattachant ont été les voix des élèves lors du Sommet sur la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes et ils ont parlé avec éloquence du désespoir que vivent certains élèves. L'article d'Amie Tolton est un rappel poignant que nous devons collaborer pour comprendre et ensuite aborder les problèmes de santé mentale chez nos élèves.

Une autre importante question dans le monde de l'éducation est celle des pensions. L'article de Larry French « *Born in tumult, now a pension giant* » relate l'histoire du Régime de retraite des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario (RREEO/OTPP) qui célébrera son 20^e anniversaire le 19 décembre prochain. Des premières modestes racines de sa vie antérieure jusqu'à sa situation actuelle, Larry French souligne la lutte de la fin des années 1980 qui a créé un partenariat du régime de retraite et des conditions qui ont fait du RREEO ce qu'il est aujourd'hui. L'article vise aussi à faire ressortir que nonobstant les récents problèmes d'évaluation actuarielle, si le RREEO n'avait pas été créé, la situation des retraités actuels et futurs aurait été vraiment terrible.

Le reste des articles de ce numéro couvre un grand éventail d'autres sujets intéressants comme la commercialisation dans les écoles, le développement du caractère et l'apprentissage du service civique, pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns. À nouveau, l'équipe éditoriale et moi-même, espérons que vous trouverez ce numéro instructif et inspirant. ☺



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We all belong/Tous du même bord

Student videos increase awareness of equity and inclusive education

Des vidéos tournées par des élèves sensibilisent le public sur l'égalité et l'éducation inclusive



In a collaborative effort to increase student awareness of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, the Thames Valley District School Board and the Waterloo Region District School Board held a video contest in the spring of 2011 to encourage students to create videos that promote the theme “We All Belong.”

The creative and artistic talents of elementary and secondary school students in both boards produced an incredible wealth of animated, stop-motion and live-action pieces that all expressed the core values of equity and inclusive education.

Among the video submissions were stories depicting the injustice among a group of flawed but ultimately redeemable superheroes, the contagious dance of inclusion spreading throughout the hallways of a school and the powerful, touching montage of pictures illustrating equity and inclusion accompanied by the musical soundtrack created by students for students.

In all, there were over 30 entries across both school boards. A panel of judges comprising administrators, teachers and students helped to narrow the field down to the top five videos from both elementary and secondary school panels, respectively.

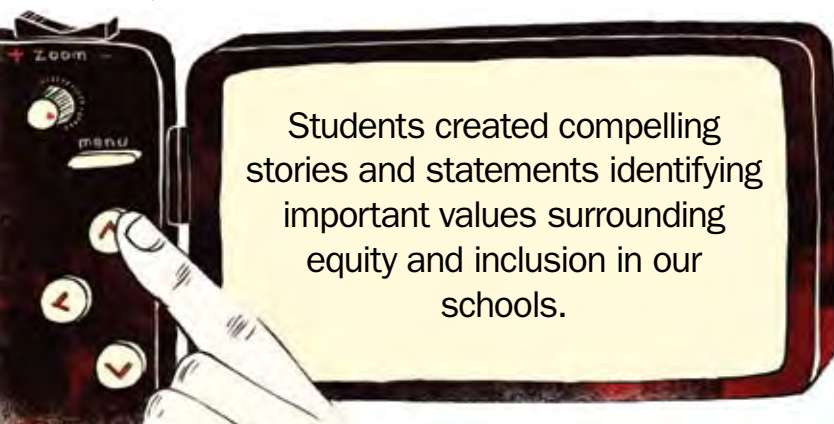
Dans le but commun de sensibiliser davantage le grand public sur la Stratégie d'égalité et d'éducation inclusive, le *Thames Valley District School Board* (TVDSB) et le *Waterloo Region District School Board* (WRDSB) ont organisé un concours de vidéos au printemps 2011 pour inciter les élèves à tourner des vidéos de promotion du thème « Tous du même bord. »

Les talents créatifs et artistiques des élèves des écoles élémentaires et secondaires des deux conseils ont produit une incroyable quantité de documents animés, de prises de vues image par image et de films sur le vif qui expriment tous les valeurs fondamentales de l'égalité et de l'éducation inclusive.

Certaines vidéos soumises illustrent l'injustice qui règne dans un groupe de super héros imparfaits, mais finalement rachetables ou la danse de l'inclusion qui se répand dans les couloirs d'une école. Une autre est un montage profondément touchant d'images illustrant l'égalité et l'inclusion, accompagné d'une piste sonore créée par les élèves, pour les élèves.

En tout, les écoles des deux conseils ont soumis plus de 30 vidéos. Un jury composé d'administrateurs, d'enseignants et d'élèves a permis de choisir les cinq meilleures vidéos

The final 10 videos were posted online where students, parents and community members could view and vote for their favourite elementary school and secondary school video. From both school boards, there were more than 2,000 votes cast within each division. The results were extremely close with just five votes separating the first- and second-place entries in the elementary division.



In total, \$3,500 was awarded in cash prizes for the purchase of resources and/or initiatives that support equity and inclusive education. These cash prizes were awarded to the top three videos for each division. In addition, plaques were provided to the top five finalists and their schools in each contest.

“We were thrilled with the number of videos submitted through the contest and, in particular, with the messages our students provided about building inclusive cultures within their own school,” said Laura Elliott, Executive Superintendent, Program Services. “Students and staff are to be commended for their participation in this first-ever video contest. We hope to offer this again next year, with even more submissions!”

The winners were as follows:

- Secondary:
First Prize: Parkside Collegiate Institute, St. Thomas
Second Prize: Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School, London
Third Prize: Forest Heights Collegiate Institute, Kitchener
- Elementary:
First Prize: Glen Cairn Public School, London
Second Prize: Victory Memorial Public School, Ingersoll
Third Prize: Elgin Street Public School, Cambridge

The videos of the top five finalists in each panel can be viewed at: www.tvdsb.ca/programs.cfm?subpage=130977&adminActivate=1

Through their creativity and imagination, students created compelling stories and statements identifying important values surrounding equity and inclusion in our schools. The true winners of this video competition are the many students who will now benefit from the resolve and strength depicted and promoted within these videos of equity and inclusion. The talent and compassion of our students have thoughtfully conveyed the powerful message and belief that *we all belong*. ☺

Kenji Takahashi, a member of District 11, Thames Valley, is a Learning Technology Coordinator with the board.

Julie Maltby is a Public Affairs Officer at the TVDSB.

provenant respectivement des écoles élémentaires et des écoles secondaires. Les dix vidéos finalistes ont été postées en ligne où les élèves, les parents et les membres de la collectivité ont pu les visionner et voter pour la vidéo des écoles élémentaires et la vidéo des écoles secondaires qu'ils préféraient. Pour les deux conseils scolaires, plus de 2 000 votes ont été comptabilisés dans chaque division. Les résultats ont été très serrés puisque, dans la division des écoles élémentaires, seulement cinq votes séparaient la vidéo classée première de la suivante.

Un total de 3 500 \$ d'argent comptant a été attribué aux gagnants pour se procurer des ressources et (ou) concrétiser des initiatives en faveur de l'égalité et de l'éducation inclusive. Ces prix en argent comptant ont été décernés aux trois vidéos classées en tête de leur division. De plus, des plaques ont été remises aux cinq finalistes et à leurs écoles pour chaque concours.

« Nous avons été enthousiasmés par le nombre de vidéos soumises dans le cadre du concours et plus particulièrement par les messages que nos élèves ont communiqués sur la création de cultures inclusives dans leur propre école, a déclaré Laura Elliott, surintendante générale, Service des programmes. Les élèves et le personnel doivent être félicités de leur participation à ce tout premier concours de vidéos. Nous espérons le proposer de nouveau l'année prochaine et recevoir encore plus de soumissions! »

Les gagnants sont les suivants :

- Niveau secondaire
Premier prix : Parkside Collegiate Institute, St. Thomas
Deuxième prix : Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School, London
Troisième prix : Forest Heights Collegiate Institute, Kitchener
- Niveau élémentaire
Premier prix : Glen Cairn Public School, London
Deuxième prix : Victory Memorial Public School, Ingersoll
Troisième prix : Elgin Street Public School, Cambridge
Vous pouvez visionner les vidéos des cinq finalistes de chaque division à l'adresse : www.tvdsb.ca/programs.cfm?subpage=130977&adminActivate=1

Grâce à leur créativité et à leur imagination, les élèves ont élaboré des histoires et des énoncés convaincants qui cernent les valeurs importantes d'égalité et d'inclusion dans nos écoles. Les véritables gagnants de ce concours de vidéos sont les nombreux élèves qui bénéficieront dorénavant de la détermination et de la résolution dépeintes et mises en avant dans ces vidéos sur l'égalité et l'inclusion. Le talent et la compassion de nos élèves leur ont permis de faire passer le message et la croyance profondément ancrés que nous sommes *tous du même bord*. ☺

Kenji Takahashi, membre du district 11, Thames Valley, est coordonnateur des technologies d'apprentissage au sein du conseil.

Julie Maltby est gestionnaire des affaires publiques au TVDSB.



Service learning as a teacher candidate

A valuable initiative in pre-service education



The pre-service teacher education program at the University of Western Ontario (UWO) includes the Transition to Professional Practice (T2P) program, a nine-day initiative that takes place in the latter part of April. Each student is responsible for finding his/her own placement, having it approved by the faculty and documenting the service provided. The variety of placements possible is wide-ranging, including both local and international initiatives. The faculty also partners with the UWO Student Success Centre, where an Experiential Education Coordinator assists students in finding service learning opportunities. T2P focuses on communities, new and different experiences, and on collaborative, project-centred learning. Going into the experience, my take on it was that two weeks of volunteering would make me a more well-rounded person and a better educator. After my experience in Laredo, Texas,

I can emphatically say it was that and so much more.

This trip, 100 per cent student-funded, consisted of 48 teacher candidates from all disciplines and divisions within the faculty. Matt Bazely, the Director of Practicum, and Keith Hole, a faculty instructor, served as staff leaders and handled the bulk of the pre-trip organization. My fellow teacher candidate Haley Motruck and I, acting as student leaders, assisted in facilitating the nightly reflections, organizing logistical matters, and problem solving the unexpected...and with 50 students...on a bus...36 hours from home there is always the unexpected!

Our trip to Laredo was a Service Learning Experience, which is very different from simply volunteering. Service Learning is volunteer work that provides a needed service to a community group or organization, but it also includes ongoing personal reflection to enhance personal and professional development. Each day of the trip

consisted of three parts. The first part was a quick pre-service meeting where we introduced some “things to consider” over the course of the day. This time of day was also used for motivation and “self care” provided courtesy of some highly motivated physical education candidates. The second part of the day was the service and the third part was a guided nightly reflection. Our goal was to look at what we learned about ourselves, what we learned about the community and its members and what we learned about broader student issues that we could take back to our classroom.

And now for the experience itself. The trip began on the morning of April 16, departing from the parking lot at UWO. What followed was 36 hours of reading, lighthearted movies, four bus drivers (some better than others), Cracker Barrel and truck stop breaks, and, best of all, getting to know the people around us. When we arrived in Laredo, we were met by two

Habitat for Humanity volunteers, who helped coordinate our food and accommodations for the week. Our accommodations were at a gated church compound consisting of a small church, large meeting room and three large dorm-style facilities. The rooms consisted of approximately 20 single cots, six sinks and an attached bathroom with six toilet and shower stalls—definitely not the amenities we are used to at home—however, everyone embraced it and, looking back, wouldn't have had it any other way.

The job site was a small community of approximately 40 homes, all built by Habitat. Our team worked on four houses, which were at various different stages of completion. Each house had a Habitat team leader who was responsible for participant safety and the construction of the home. In addition, there were a number of Habitat team members that kept the site going by providing water, meals and constant reminders to put on sunscreen. You haven't felt hot until you have been in 100 degree Texas heat!

We also had the opportunity to work with family members who would be purchasing the homes we were working on. Each recipient of a Habitat home is required to put a certain number of hours into the building of their own home or others. They must also purchase the home from Habitat. Habitat for Humanity provides affordable homes and adjusted mortgage arrangements to those in need. Families must apply for a Habitat house and it is an extensive process, but it is definitely not a handout.

Having the home owners onsite provided us with the opportunity to work with them and get to know them on a personal level. The spirit and positive energy they brought to life was incredible, especially considering many of the struggles and hardships they had endured. Working with the family members reminded many of us on the trip that you can't judge someone by the way they look or what assistance they may need because you don't know the history behind it. This is something we will all take to our classrooms in the future.

After an authentic Texan lunch each day, we worked for 3-4 more hours in the afternoon Texas sun. On each site, the volunteers made their way into teams and

tackled various jobs, including roofing, siding, cabinet installation and landscaping. I have to make mention of the landscaping teams because they taught me a lesson about positive spirit. Landscaping basically consisted of digging holes with a pick and shovel in rock-hard Texas clay, yet the landscaping teams always seemed to be having the most fun. I have kept this thought with me as a reminder that you can make almost anything fun with the right attitude, people and leadership.

In the evenings, we participated in a number of planned activities, which included an authentic Mexican fiesta, a \$4 Chinese buffet, a trip to a Texas steakhouse and a keynote address from a member of Border Patrol, who provided a completely different perspective of life in the USA and Mexico and some of the struggles and corruption that take place. It was truly eye-opening and made us even more thankful for what we have.

Our reflection time each night consisted of individual and group reflection/activities on our experiences from the day, thoughts and judgments we experienced,

personal privilege, and the idea of helping versus serving. I have had this discussion with many of the teacher candidates from the trip. I wish I could sum it up in a couple of sentences, but there is just far too much. What did I learn from the experience? Never judge a person or situation until you know the background. Love and value what you have in your life. Never stop making new friends. And, most importantly, always remember to work because you love it. The great thing is that every single person on the trip had a different experience, learned different things and will bring something unique to their own teaching experience.

Looking back, I would not trade a single moment. I hope that everyone who educates young people has the opportunity to experience their own "Laredo" and works to create similar opportunities for their own students...I know I will! ☺

Rob Murison graduated from the Technological Education pre-service program at UWO in 2011 and is now actively seeking employment as a Construction Technology teacher.

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Teen dystopia

Should we be worried about what Generation Z is reading?



Escapism comes in many forms, but reading fantasy stories has always been at the top of my list. I love to “suspend my disbelief” as new worlds emerge through literature, and I hold in high regard those authors who create imaginary worlds so flawlessly that they remain relatable. Think of the far-fetched lives of Luke Skywalker and Frodo Baggins, and how these protagonists were able to elicit such sympathy from readers and moviegoers alike. And you can’t mention fantasy or teen lit without thinking of the popularity of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.

New to the growing list of fantasy novels is *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. Similar to its predecessors, this series tells a dark tale about the battle of good versus evil. However, what makes *The Hunger Games* much bleaker is the

setting. *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* take place in worlds unknown to us, while *Harry Potter*, though partly set in the United Kingdom, is kept separate from our culture by the magical and impossible lives of wizards.

The Hunger Games, however, is set in a future North America, where extreme climate change has destroyed society (an idea that is derivative of current concerns). From its ruins, a new one, Panem, has emerged. It consists of the Capitol and 12 Districts, each with its own industry. People in many of the districts live in extreme poverty and food is scarce; families must make great sacrifices to survive. It is an all too real depiction of the conditions in third-world countries today, and a depressing reminder of wartime and the battle for food rations.

Panem once had a District 13, but it was annihilated to set an example after the uprisings of the Dark Days, when people revolted against the totalitarian ways of the Capitol. Every year, the districts must put forward two tributes, one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 and 18, to participate in The Hunger Games, as a reminder of the ultimate power of the Capitol. The Hunger Games have one victor, who must survive the dangerous elements concocted by the Capitol, in addition to killing off the other 23 tributes. The tribute who wins will be rewarded with a life of wealth and comfort, while their District will gain prosperity through gifts of grain, oil and sugar.

Does this gruesome scenario sound like your average teen novel? The theme is one we’ve seen before: totalitarian

dictatorship in a post-apocalyptic world where human beings are disposable. In fact, it strikes me as an updated, if watered-down, version of Orwell's *1984*, but with much more violence. And, although the concept of the child soldier

Games, they understand that one wrong photo or comment can ruin your reputation and potentially your teenage life.

Partly, these novels are merely indicative of the generation gap emerging between Generations Y and Z. On the one

like Rowling's Hermione Granger in the sense that she is intelligent, resourceful and shows strength of character, while retaining a tenderness that is uniquely female. However, unlike Hermione, who plays a supporting role in the Potter series, Katniss, a hunter by trade, is front and centre. And it's about time. Female readers have waited much too long to have a strong, yet balanced, heroine to identify with in the literary world.

In the end, despite my initial misgivings, I view this series as a well-constructed allegory that reflects a more realistic portrayal of our world. Because don't we indeed live in a world where violence and torture exist and tyrannical rule leads to poverty and suffering? Isn't there often an extreme gap between the rich and the poor? Don't we urge our youth to take a stand? Isn't much of our hope dependent on future generations?

The Hunger Games series highlights all of these questions and more, and urges the teen reader never to take their lives for granted. As such, it is also capable of teaching them to sympathize with those who are not as fortunate and of inspiring them to do outreach in communities that need help. In essence, it fits extremely well with the social justice movement that has emerged in our schools over the last few years. Overall, I believe Suzanne Collins' series would be a successful choice for discussion in social awareness groups, library discussion groups and for independent projects at the senior level. ☺

Sophie Boyer was an English and history teacher in District 19, Peel, who now lives in B.C.



Don't we urge our youth to take a stand? Isn't much of our hope dependent on future generations?

has been visited in teen lit such as *Ender's Game*, Collins' series achieves a more all-encompassing loss of innocence, as the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, and her loved ones not only fight for their individual lives, but also become responsible for the fate of the entire country.

Similar to *1984*, where citizens are scared into submission by Big Brother, who is "always watching," in *The Hunger Games* all game-related events are televised. The entire country watches as families struggle through the "reapings" in the 12 Districts, and the game itself is broadcast 24 hours a day. Players, who in this case are still young adults, must avoid crying or showing any form of weakness, because it is their strength and will to survive that will garner them support from their District. And the more support a player has, the more likely they are to get gifts such as food to help them win.

The entire premise of *The Hunger Games* series is disturbing, which is perhaps what makes it so appealing to teenagers who are well-versed in global tragedies, and who often exhibit a new world maturity about social justice and the virtues and vices of social media. Teenagers today will identify immediately with the importance of media personas, having spent most of their lives inundated with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Like the players in the Hunger

Games, this novel seems overly violent, but is it much different than the video games, such as *Assassin's Creed*, *Halo* and *Borderlands*, teenagers play? *Mike Tyson's Punch Out* for original Nintendo seems like a Disney movie by comparison. On the other hand, Generation Z appears to have a new social awareness, with the success of such charities as Free the Children. This awareness leads to a more tragic understanding of the world, but never without the hope for a better future. And it is life's tragedies that Collins' series explores; despite the overwhelming gloom and futility that is present throughout, she never fails to incite hope in the disheartened reader.

It's heavy stuff, but it's very good. I'm drawn to it for several reasons. First, the prose is concisely written and the plot moves quickly with action, drama and surprise twists. In addition, Collins weaves strong symbolism throughout the text that is meaningful and contributes to character development well. Her characters make mistakes and must deal with the complexities of identity, relationships, love and loss, just as we all do, and I believe this is what makes her novels appealing even to adult audiences.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, Katniss follows Joseph Campbell's archetypal journey, but is refreshingly female in the pop culture cannon of the hero's (now heroine's) quest. She is

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BORN IN TUMULT NOW A PENSION GIANT

The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan turns 20

By Larry French

Dedicated to our Superannuation Commissioners Don Scott, Fred Allen, Sal Pengelley, Gerald Armstrong and the hundreds of activists who supported them.

On December 19, 1991, when the *Act to amend the Teachers' Pension Act, 1989*, received Royal Assent in the Ontario Legislature, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) as we know it was born. At that time, it was valued at \$19 billion. In 2011, the fund's 20th anniversary, it stands at about \$110 billion, making the OTPP the largest single-profession pension plan in Canada, and indeed one of the largest, most successful in the world. Achieving the present pension partnership with the Government of Ontario did not come easy. Today, defined benefit pension plans like ours are under siege in North America. If it gets to the point where we must defend our plan, we would do well to recall our decade-long struggle to achieve it, and where we would have been had we not succeeded.

THE 1980s: "FAIRY MONEY"

In the years of the *Teachers' Superannuation Act*, the Government of Ontario was the guarantor of the pension fund. In return, the assets of the fund were restricted to non-negotiable government debentures, with interest rates set by the Treasurer of Ontario. Ontario teachers provided nearly half the provincial debt,

financing the roads, bridges and general infrastructure of the province.

OSSTF/FEESO's Superannuation Commissioners, working with our Superannuation Committee, became increasingly aware that the fund's return was inadequate and becoming more so. The Treasurer of Ontario was careful to choose low interest troughs to calculate the annual return, thus ensuring a supply of low-cost, "below market rate" money to the province. The low return of the fund then became the pretext for refusing benefit improvements.

The total governmental control of the fund was outlined by OSSTF/FEESO Superannuation Commissioner Don Scott. Following a visit of the teacher commissioners at government invitation to "view" the debentures in the vaults at Queen's Park, Scott asked that the vault be opened to see the debentures for himself. "Sorry, no," was the reply; apparently, only selected government officials had the right to do so. In his report, Scott coined the term "fairy money" to underline the illusory nature of our pension fund assets. "Diversification," the right to invest in equities as well as government bonds, and "joint control" became the battle cries.

THE TERMINATOR

Finally, in the late 1980s, the teachers of

Ontario entered into pension reform negotiations with the Ontario Liberal government. Progress was made in the areas of governance and diversification of investments. Teachers insisted, in addition, on a form of arbitrated "dispute resolution" in case of disagreement with the government over contribution or benefit levels. The Treasurer of Ontario of the day, Bob Nixon, was adamantly opposed, and on January 11, 1989, he vetoed a full and equal pension partnership and broke off negotiations. Rod Albert, at that time the president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF), labeled Nixon "The Terminator." The pension war was on.

THE RALLIES, THE SIT-IN

Province-wide, teachers mobilized. Lobbying and political action were the order of the day. Government members and party officials were confronted by determined teachers in local ridings and at Queen's Park. Demonstrations erupted across the province.

On a bitterly cold 1989 March evening in Peterborough, several thousand teachers ringed the hall where Premier David Peterson was to meet local Liberals. The Premier, angry at having to circle the edge of the rally for an hour before being able to access the hall, labeled the teachers and their concerns "silly."

The Builders: Claude Lamoureux and Bob Bertram

Claude Lamoureux, the first CEO of the OTPP, made service to the members the OTPP's hallmark. He supervised the recalculation of 50,000 pensions in the early 1990s, adding as much as \$200,000 in value to some of them. A six-month backlog of 10,000 pension applications was quickly cleared away, and virtual overnight response to requests was installed. To bring much-needed improvements to corporate governance, he co-founded the Canadian Coalition for Good Governance.

Bob Bertram, Lamoureux's first hire, implemented a revolution in pension management. Capitalizing on its size, OTPP managed its assets internally, eliminating fees of up to seven per cent, an enormous saving. OTPP was the first to buy a real estate company and became in effect a merchant bank, issuing debentures backed by the fund, and using innovative risk management strategies.

When Lamoureux retired in 2007, pension analyst Adil Sayeed calculated that if the Caisse de Dépôt had had the results of OTPP over the previous 17 years, the Caisse would have been richer by \$50 billion. Similarly, with the Caisse's results, OTPP would have been \$40 billion poorer. Therein lies a multitude of pensions.

On April 1, in one of the largest rallies in Ontario history, 26,000 teachers from every corner of the province marched around the Convention Centre where the Ontario Liberal Party was meeting. They then filled Copps Coliseum to hear the Treasurer defend his decision to retain control of the pension fund. When Bob Rae, NDP leader, promised to support a true pension partnership, he received a standing ovation. His quip, "But will you love me in the morning?" brought down the house.

In the afternoon of December 13, small groups of OTF and affiliate officials, staff and teachers entered the lobby of the Mowat Block. Riding the elevators to the 20th, 21st and 23rd floors, they quietly sauntered to the stairwells. When everyone was in place, OTF President Bev Polowy and her executive rode the elevator to the 22nd floor. As she demanded a meeting with Minister of Education Sean Conway, the demonstrators flooded the office from the stairwell. The surprise was complete. The Minister, not amused to be trapped in his office, finally fled through a back stairway without meeting Polowy. The impasse continued.

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

In 1987, Premier David Peterson had achieved one of the largest majorities in Ontario history. With support levels at 50 per cent, his government seemed invulnerable and, a recession on the way, on July 30, 1990, Peterson called an early election for September 6.

OSSTF/FEESO was ready. Its budget, approved at the previous Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly, was \$1 million. Anticipating an early election call, the Federation had already set up its war room in May. Three election desk teams were established, coordinated by Peterborough's Vito Barbuto, and three mobile task forces each with an RV fanned out across the province.

The Election Planning Committee, chaired by President Jim Head with the addition of consultant Graham Murray, decided that the chronic underfunding of schools would be the issue to engage the public. A public relations firm created the slogan "Spending too little on public

schools is child neglect." Jack Hutton, Director of Communications, proposed that the message be carried province-wide on a series of immense billboards. The press and the public were captivated.

Premier Peterson had gambled that the summer doldrums would offer him a sleepy, non-eventful campaign. His strategy backfired, as teachers and educational workers joined local campaigns in unprecedented numbers.

What started out as the most quixotic of quests ended in triumph as the Peterson government was defeated in a historic upset on September 6. The irresistible force had dislodged the immovable object. Within a year, the OTF had negotiated a pension partnership with the New Democratic Party government. The decade-long battle had been won!

A FRESH START

Fuelled by burgeoning teacher numbers and a low retirement rate, the Teachers' Superannuation Fund had grown during the 1980s from \$4 billion to a respectable \$19 billion when the OTPP took over its assets. There was, however, a nasty \$7.8 billion unfunded liability. From this starting point, newly appointed CEO Claude Lamoureux and his investment guru, Bob Bertram, began to work their magic. By investing massively in equities and real estate, not permitted under the old rules, the fund began to generate surpluses that retired the debt and made possible benefit improvements.

In 1996, the early retirement penalty was reduced from a punitive five per cent to 2.5 per cent. The mythical, long-dreamed-of "85 factor" introduced in 1998 was made permanent in 2001.

Ontario teachers began to have access to healthy pensions after ever-fewer years of service. When one considers that these pensions are indexed to the cost of living, this is a rare privilege.

ROBUST GROWTH

The fund's growth has been spectacular. By 2000, fund assets had reached \$73 billion. The number of pensioners had increased from 39,000 to 77,000. The OTPP, or "Teachers," is a big player on Bay Street and indeed internationally. Some



investments, like Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, caught the imagination and brought in a steady revenue stream, even if no Stanley Cup. If you looked at the *Annual Report*, you were introduced to the arcane world of “swaps, derivatives, hedges, futures and forwards” enumerated in most of the currencies of the developed world. In 2010, despite Enrons, tech, subprime and other market crashes, the fund reached \$107 billion. The number of pensioners now sits at 120,000.

The vision that teachers had in the 1980s of emancipating their pension fund from government control has been rewarded. “Teachers” is the envy of Bay Street with an annualized rate of return of 10 per cent over the 20 years of its life. The giant Caisse de Dépôt, the Quebec public sector pension plan, averaged just 7.7 per cent, the Toronto Stock Exchange, only seven per cent. If you had invested \$10,000 in the fund in 1990 and left it untouched until 2010, it would have risen to \$67,270. The OTPP has also been nimble in adversity, and even in the calamitous year 2008, when it dropped 18 per cent, the Caisse dropped 25 per cent, the TSX 35 per cent and many mutual funds, 40 per cent.

Skilful investing has been a necessity to fund our pensions, as payout levels are now almost double contribution income. Between 1990 and 2010, the fund grew by \$87 billion. Contributions totaled \$32 billion, while the payout in pensions was \$53 billion. The \$21 billion difference was part of the value added our managers brought to the fund. In all, the fund’s income increased by an impressive \$55 billion beyond contributions. One shudders at the thought of what might have occurred if the fund were still constrained to invest only in government bonds. The Government of Ontario would have had to help make up the enormous shortfalls to pay our pensions. A political football if ever there was one.

THE CHALLENGE OF INTEREST RATES

In 2010, despite its impressive investment record, the OTPP faced a major challenge. A \$17 billion actuarial deficit, provoked by low interest rates and increased pensioner longevity, was addressed by a contribution increase and benefit

reduction. J. Kenneth Galbraith once commented that the primary function of economic forecasters is to make astrologers look good. Actuaries have an even greater challenge, having to forecast 70 plus years down the road. The impact of their calculations is enormous: a one per cent variance in predicted rates means \$25 billion in increased or decreased fund liability. In other words, if our actuaries, noted for their conservative stance, had adjusted their forecast benchmark by 0.8 per cent to approach that used by the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS), the deficit would have disappeared. In the 1980s, the teacher federations noted that the Superannuation Fund without fail performed better than the actuaries had predicted. The OTPP and its members will have to resolve this thorny question to ensure future fund stability.

GOING FORWARD

Ontario teacher pensions were introduced in 1917. They were capped at \$1,000 after 40 years of service. We have come a long way. The Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan is a model of pension delivery and quality of service. Our contributions have always been on the high end, but this is the price of pension security. When commentators take a run at teachers’ “gold-plated” pensions, we can reply that we had to go to the trenches to achieve them. They were, are and will continue to be worth fighting for. ☺

Larry French is a Life Member of OSSTF/FEESO and a former Director of Communications/Political Action at the provincial office.

Resources provided by the OSSTF/FEESO Research Library, Information & Archives and the Communications Branch, OTPP.



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Just beneath the surface Sous la surface

Stephen Lewis Secondary
School art exhibit on
mental health

Exposition d'art sur la santé
mentale de la Stephen Lewis
Secondary School

By/par Amie Tolton

Grade 12 photography student Ashley's photograph, *Release...*, is her visual representation of what she thought it must be like for someone to commit suicide. She explains it as, "Water has the ability to wash away the literal and figurative dirt on our bodies and soul. Giving one's life over to water could be the cathartic release of pressures from the world that someone who commits suicide may be attempting to attain."

Release... is just one example of the photographic-based body of artwork called *Just Beneath the Surface*. The series was created by Stephen Lewis Secondary

Release (libération)... est la représentation visuelle d'Ashley, élève en photographie de 12^e année, de ce qu'elle pense être le ressenti d'une personne qui se suicide. Elle l'explique en ces termes : « L'eau a la capacité de laver littéralement et figurativement la saleté de notre corps et de notre âme. S'abandonner à l'eau peut être une libération cathartique des pressions exercées par le monde vers laquelle peut tendre la personne qui s'enlève la vie. »


Release (libération)... n'est qu'un exemple des photographies exposées sous le titre « *Juste sous la surface* ». Cette série a été créée par les élèves de la *Stephen Lewis*

ILLUSTRATION: KAREN KLASSEN

/CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

/SUITE À LA PAGE 23





Dear You

I'm so sorry it came to this. I locked the bathroom door so you don't have to see me like this. I made the bathtub my last resting place so you don't have to worry about cleaning up any more of the messes I've made. I can't tell you how much I love you and how much I tried to fix this, but we both know I've been dead a long time now. A walking ghost in this life, pretending to live. The truth is I'm sad, I'm sad all the time and I can't live as a prisoner in this body anymore. I don't want you to feel sorry for me. Tell mom and dad I love them and I'm sorry I couldn't be the child they always wanted, but I hope that time will heal all the scars I've left behind. I'm tired of crying, of trying, of failing...

Love Always, Me

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21/

School students from the Peel District School Board as a way to bring awareness and empathy towards mental health disorders. At the request of Judith Nyman, Director of Program Policy for the Ontario Public School Board Associa-

tion, on behalf of the Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health, students from Stephen Lewis Secondary School created an art exhibit that explores mental health disorders through student art.

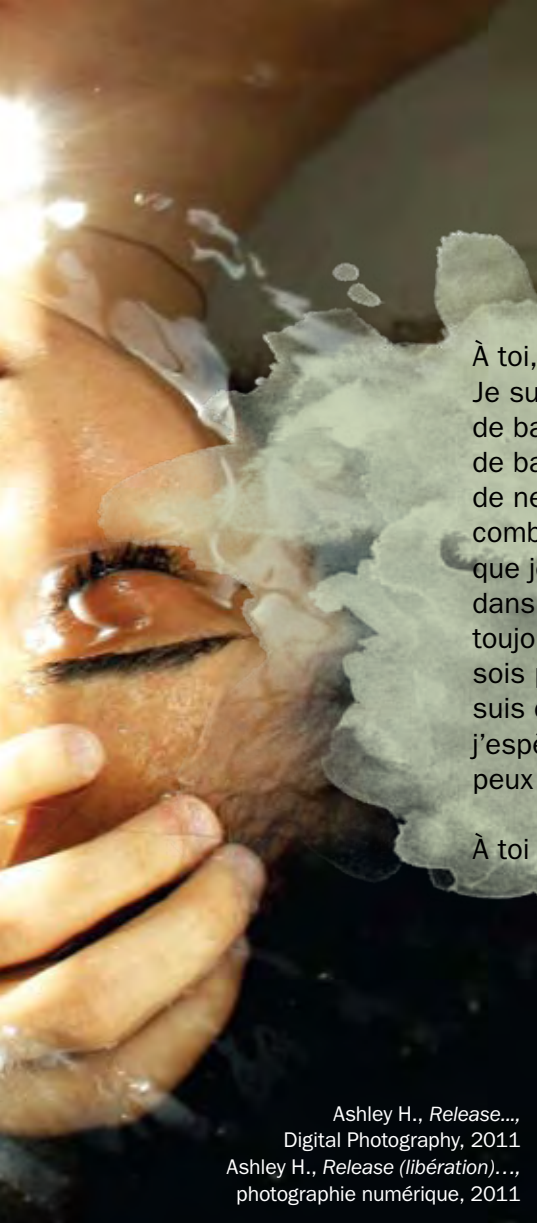
The work was on display at the Summit on Children and Youth Mental

Health held on June 2, 2011, at the Sheraton Centre Hotel in Toronto. The Summit was held by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association as an event to unite many sectors affected by the mental health of our youth, including mental health professionals, children's services, parents and students. The goal of this summit was to begin a discourse around the urgency in creating equitable and timely access to mental health services for our youth in Ontario. It was fitting that the opportunity arose to participate in this summit, as this body of artwork had already sprung up naturally in the senior photography class through various discussions and through personal experience.

Samra's photograph *Zero* (#2 in the series) deals with the feelings of someone

/CONTINUED ON PAGE 24





Ashley H., *Release...*,
Digital Photography, 2011
Ashley H., *Release (libération)...*,
photographie numérique, 2011

À toi,

Je suis désolée d'en être arrivée là. Je me suis enfermée dans la salle de bain pour que tu ne me voies pas dans cet état. J'ai fait de la salle de bain mon dernier lieu de repos pour que tu n'aies plus à t'inquiéter de nettoyer derrière moi. Je ne te dirai jamais assez combien je t'aime et combien j'ai tenté de réparer mes erreurs, mais nous savons tous deux que je suis morte depuis longtemps déjà – un fantôme qui déambule dans cette vie, en prétendant vivre. La vérité est que je me sens triste, toujours triste et que je ne peux plus vivre prisonnière de ce corps. Ne sois pas triste pour moi. Dis à maman et à papa que je les aime, que je suis désolée de ne pas avoir été l'enfant qu'ils ont toujours voulue et que j'espère que cela refermera toutes les blessures que j'ai infligées. Je n'en peux plus de pleurer, d'essayer, d'échouer...

À toi pour toujours. Moi

SUITE DE LA PAGE 21/

Secondary School du *Peel District School Board* comme moyen de sensibiliser et de susciter l'empathie envers les troubles de santé mentale. À la demande de Judith Nyman, directrice des politiques relatives aux programmes de l'OPSBA (*Ontario Public School Boards' Association*) et au nom de la Coalition pour la santé mentale des enfants et des adolescents, les élèves de la *Stephen Lewis Secondary School* ont mis sur pied une exposition d'arts qui se penche sur les troubles de santé mentale à travers l'art.

Leurs travaux ont été exposés lors du Sommet sur la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes qui a eu lieu le 2 juin 2011 à l'hôtel Sheraton de Toronto. Ce sommet était organisé par l'OPSBA en tant que moyen de réunir de nombreux sec-

teurs touchés par les problèmes de santé mentale des jeunes : professionnels de la santé mentale, services à l'enfance, parents et élèves. Le but de ce sommet était d'entamer une discussion sur l'urgence de créer un accès équitable et opportun aux services de santé mentale pour les jeunes ontariens. L'occasion de prendre part à ce sommet était toute trouvée puisque ces réalisations avaient déjà vu jour naturellement dans la classe de photographie senior suite à diverses discussions et à des expériences personnelles.

La photographie intitulée *Zéro* (n° 2 de la série) de Samra traite de ce que ressent une personne qui tente de combattre la dépression – une lutte à laquelle elle a vu nombre de ses amis se livrer lorsqu'ils étaient aux prises avec les pressions scolaires et personnelles tout autant qu'avec les attentes de leurs camarades. « Cette série d'images dépeint le sentiment que l'on a d'être emprisonné en soi-même..., d'être si déprimé qu'on ne peut pas s'affranchir de ses propres pensées..., d'apercevoir des parts de soi-même sans

même se reconnaître ni connaître sa propre valeur. »

Les jeunes artistes que sont Ashley, Samra, Fatima, Nikita et May ont toutes trouvé leur inspiration pour ces travaux dans leurs propres expériences ainsi qu'après avoir appréhendé le manque de ressources auxquelles les personnes aux prises avec des troubles de santé mentale devaient faire face. Cette inspiration les a conduites à mener d'importantes recherches pour créer ces images qui jettent un regard authentique sur le monde des troubles de santé mentale.

Le groupe a ensuite relevé le défi de faire de ces réalisations une exposition. Voir des jeunes artistes participer et organiser leur propre exposition n'arrive pas si souvent et exige un engagement conséquent en termes de temps. Non seulement ont-elles pris le contrôle de la création de leurs propres travaux, mais elles se sont aussi chargées du processus dans son ensemble, de l'édition des réflexions des artistes jusqu'à l'encadrement et l'installation des réalisations.

/SUITE À LA PAGE 25





I'd introduce myself, but I would prefer that you just know me as Zero. Zero as in the number. Zero as in nothing. Because, after all, I am nothing. People don't like me; they say I'm odd. They think I'm ugly. They think I'm dumb because I can barely pass math class. They walk all over me for their own benefit and toss me aside when they no longer have a use for me. I am invisible to them, they pretend like I don't know what they are saying, but I hear it all. Every word. They cut me into pieces each time. I am trapped in this darkness, with no way to get out

Samra E., *Zero* (#2 in the series), Digital Photography, 2011
Samra E., *Zéro* (n° 2 de la série), photographie numérique, 2011

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22/

trying to cope with depression, a struggle she has found many of her friends facing while combating the pressures of academics, family, personal and peer expectations. "This series of images depicts the feeling of being trapped within oneself... being so depressed that you cannot get out of your own head... you catch glimpses of yourself and no longer recognize who you are or the worth you have."

Student artists Ashley, Samra, Fatima, Nikita and May all found inspiration to do this work from their personal experiences, as well as from their recognition of the lack of resources available for people struggling with mental health disorders. From this inspiration, the students completed extensive research to make the body of work an authentic glimpse into the world of mental health disorders.

The group then rose to the challenge of putting together an exhibition. Having student artists participate and organize their own exhibition does not happen often and required an extensive time commitment. Not only did they control the creation of their own work, they were also responsible for the entire process, including editing the artist statements as well as the framing and installing of the work.

Just Beneath the Surface is the students' interpretation of what it feels like to experience various mental health disorders, including but not exclusively mood disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, schizophrenia and attention deficit disorders. The student artists felt it was important to communicate how mental health plays an integral part in academic and personal success. It has been their experience that many people have little understanding about the reality of mental disorders and its causes.

Their message is one of a need for change, hope and courage. And it is the hope of the students that creating artwork of this nature will help create a dialogue and effect the change necessary to make a difference for all students suffering from mental health disorders. ☺

Amie Tolton is the Head of Arts at Stephen Lewis Secondary School in District 19, Peel.

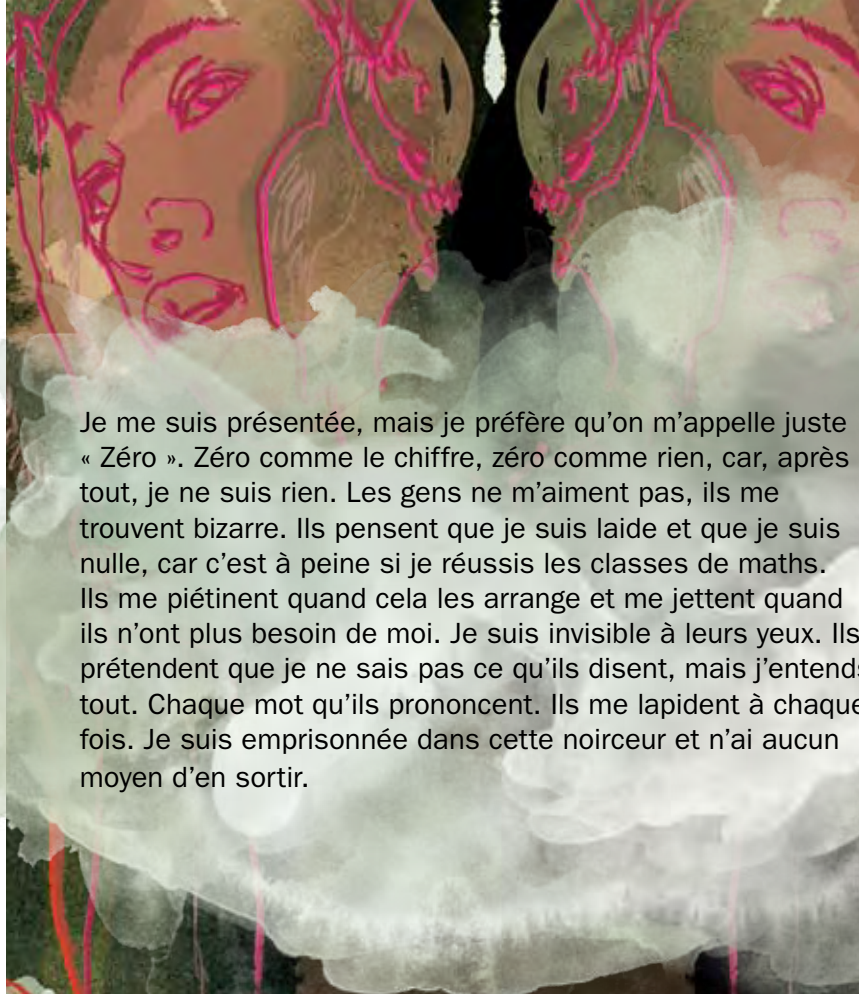


SUITE DE LA PAGE 23/

L'exposition « *Juste sous la surface* » est l'interprétation des élèves du ressenti des personnes atteintes de divers troubles de santé mentale qui vont, sans toutefois s'y limiter, des troubles de l'humeur, de l'anxiété et de l'alimentation à la schizophrénie, en passant par les déficits d'attention. Les jeunes artistes ont pensé qu'il était important de communiquer la manière dont la santé mentale faisait partie intégrante de la réussite scolaire et personnelle. On sait par expérience que bien des personnes connaissent très mal la réalité des troubles mentaux et de leurs causes.

Leur message traduit un besoin de changement, l'espoir et le courage. Les élèves espèrent qu'en créant des réalisations de cette nature, un dialogue s'ensuivra pour aboutir aux changements nécessaires pour que les élèves qui souffrent de troubles de santé mentale voient leur vie s'améliorer. ☺

Amie Tolton est la directrice de la section des arts de la *Stephen Lewis Secondary School* du district 19, Peel.



Je me suis présentée, mais je préfère qu'on m'appelle juste « Zéro ». Zéro comme le chiffre, zéro comme rien, car, après tout, je ne suis rien. Les gens ne m'aiment pas, ils me trouvent bizarre. Ils pensent que je suis laide et que je suis nulle, car c'est à peine si je réussis les classes de maths. Ils me piétinent quand cela les arrange et me jettent quand ils n'ont plus besoin de moi. Je suis invisible à leurs yeux. Ils prétendent que je ne sais pas ce qu'ils disent, mais j'entends tout. Chaque mot qu'ils prononcent. Ils me lapident à chaque fois. Je suis emprisonnée dans cette noirceur et n'ai aucun moyen d'en sortir.

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Moments of startling clarity

Moral education programming in Ontario today

By Dr. Stephen L. Anderson

Every teacher has moments of startling clarity. Sometimes these are moments of light—epiphanies—when some truth “shines through” to us in an unforeseen way and changes our perspective. At other times, though, such clarity comes in a flash of disillusionment, when a sad realization takes from us forever a comforting delusion.

I recently had one of these moments while I was teaching my senior Philosophy class. We had just finished a unit on Metaphysics and were about to get into Ethics, the philosophy of how we make moral judgments. The school had also just had several social-justice-type assemblies—multiculturalism, women’s rights, anti-violence and gay acceptance. So there was no shortage of reference points from which to begin.

I needed an attention-getter: something to really spark interest, something to shock the students awake and make them commit to an ethical judgment. This would form a baseline from which they could begin to ask questions about the legitimacy of moral judgments of all kinds, and then pursue various theories—Utilitarianism, Neo-Kantianism, Virtue Ethics, Nihilism, Moral Pragmatism and so on.

I decided to open by simply displaying, without comment, the photo of Bibi

Aisha. Aisha was the Afghani teenager who was forced into an abusive marriage with a Taliban fighter, who abused her and kept her with his animals. When she attempted to flee, her family caught her, hacked off her nose and ears, and left her for dead in the mountains. After crawling to her grandfather’s house, she was saved by a nearby American hospital. I felt quite sure that my students, seeing the suffering of this poor girl of their own age, would have a clear ethical reaction, from which we could build toward more difficult cases.

The picture is horrific. Aisha’s beautiful eyes stare hauntingly back at you above the mangled hole that was once her nose. Some of my students could not even raise their eyes to look at it. I could see that many were experiencing deep emotions.

But I was not prepared for their reaction. I had expected strong aversion; but that’s not what I got. Instead, they became confused. They seemed not to know *what* to think. They spoke timidly, afraid to make *any* moral judgment at all. They were unwilling to criticize any situation originating in a different culture. They said, “Well, we might not like it, but maybe over there it’s okay.” One student said, “I don’t feel anything at all; I see lots of this kind of stuff.” Another said (with no conscious-

ness of self-contradiction), “It’s just *wrong* to judge other cultures.”

As a teacher, I had to do something. Like most teachers, I felt uncomfortable with becoming too directive in moral matters; but in this case, I could not see how I could avoid it. I wondered, “How can kids who have been so thoroughly basted in the language of minority rights be so numb to a clear moral offense?” Where are all those “character traits” we inculcate to address their moral formation? You know them—empathy, caring, respect, courage—the wording may vary among boards, but we all know the script.

My class was “character developed” and had all the “traits” in place. They were *honest*—very frank in their views. They had *empathy*—extending it in equal measure to Aisha and to the demented subculture that sliced her up. They were *accepting*—even of child mutilation. And they *persevered*—no matter how I prodded they did not leave their nonjudgmental position. I left that class shaking my head. It seemed clear to me that for some students—clearly not all—the lesson of character education initiatives is acceptance of all things at all costs. While we may hope some are capable of bridging the gap between principled morality and this ethically vacuous relativism, it is evident that a good many

are not. For them, the overriding message is “never judge, never criticize, never take a position.”

Can we be sure that our current moral education strategies are not producing ethical paralytics? Are we really teaching *attitudes* or just *platitudes*? The questions are unsettling, but cannot be avoided.

to be open-minded—but do we want them to be so open-minded they can never close on a solid truth? If so, we are not acting as educators, for we are telling them that there really is nothing worth knowing after all.

The problem with “Character Development” programs is that they are really

lot of cheerleading going on, but there’s a distinct shortage of evidence that any “game” is being won here.

Let me say very clearly that I do not hold teachers responsible for this situation—at least, not entirely. We do what we can with what we are given and, sometimes, that’s not much. In the case

The goal of keeping public peace is important;

but it is not more important than the goal of instilling moral fibre in our students.

And if the cost of the peace is denying any basis for social justice,

then the price is just too high.

How can we claim to be forming character in our students when we refuse to commit to any moral position ourselves? If character education is to have any substantive value, it ought also to specify with what or whom we should empathize (or conversely, not empathize) and to explain why or why not.

That said, there are areas in which we *have* been quite directive. In anti-bullying campaigns, homosexual rights assemblies, multicultural fairs, social justice drives and women’s rights initiatives, we do not hesitate to preach, admonish or dictate because we feel so fervently committed to our ground. But it is clear that the message of women’s rights had been, in the case of Bibi Aisha, outshouted by the metamessage too often embedded in these programs—that there are *no* real standards, *no* certain moral truths, and *no* final ground to stand on; and that anyone who thinks there is, is simply naïve or a bigot. In this case, even the strong rhetoric of women’s rights could not survive the acid bath of universal tolerance.

We want kids to be tolerant—but do we want them to be so tolerant that they do not raise a finger to stop a bully? We want them to be compassionate—but do we want them to expend their compassion on women-abusers and despots? We want them to have integrity—but do we want that expressed as insularity, indifference or egocentricity? We want them

lists of verbs masquerading as nouns. For example, “tolerance” only *looks* like a noun: but really has no meaning until we add an object to it—we have to ask, “Tolerate *what*?” Likewise, “courage” can take various referents: one can be a courageous *rescuer* or a courageous *liar*—but nothing substantive is taught by the general directive to be “courageous.” Again, “honesty” looks universally good: but only until you consider how hurtful a direct answer can sometimes be, or how excessive forthrightness can expose innocent others to danger or foment rumours, when indirectness or silence might not.

Nothing in the package passed down to the schools by the Ministry, *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12*, addresses these sorts of worries. It comes with no means for assessing the real results it claims to produce. Consider your own school: has there been any attempt at all to measure the outcomes? How many “bad” kids have been made “good?” How much violence has been curbed? How many incidents of prejudice have been prevented? Do we know for certain that the activities promoted by our character clubs have any verifiable impact on their fellow students, or are we just *hoping* some good is being done? How many of these clubs are populated by students who would already have been “good” anyway? And how would we ever know if we did any good? There’s a

of character education, the government handed teachers a confusing package of moral platitudes. No wonder, then, that the evidence for any results has been feeble, despite the government’s loud claims to the contrary. Teachers weren’t given much to work with.

Yet I’m also not out to criticize the Government of Ontario or the Ministry of Education. But I don’t believe that character education is the panacea that they claim it is. The more you know about the history of the program, and the more you understand how irrational its sponsoring theories are, the more reason you have to be skeptical. It is simply a bizarre mix of Neo-Aristotelian virtue language, Kolbergian developmentalism and American-style Character Education ideology. It has no internal logic.

I’m not saying that character education is itself destructive, just blandly ineffective. Yet there are some situations in which something benign becomes malignant through the expectations that are placed on it. Take, for example, when a person with cancer is given a placebo. Or suppose a person trusts her weight to a hiking staff that has become damp-rotted inside. To rest too much on the performance of such things invites disaster.

In much the same way, so long as we do not expect much of character education, we are likely to be safe. The danger appears when we expect it to be some sort



of remedy to real-world social dysfunction and we begin to think that schools are addressing that. In truth, we might not be strengthening the moral integrity of our students; in fact, we could be weakening it—particularly in respect to their ability to form and hold moral convictions.

And we do need our kids to have strong moral fibre. Without it, pleas for social justice fall on deaf ears. We *need* our kids to have real and firm convictions, not just knee-jerk “tolerance.” We aim at making “autonomous moral agents,” young people who choose freely to do the right thing because they understand how particular actions rationalize with their own values, and with the worldview to which they are rationally committed. We need the sort of moral conviction that makes it possible for students to explain to themselves, and to skeptical others, not just *what* they believe, but *why* they believe it; and to stand for social justice on the basis of a deep and intelligent personal conviction of its rightness. Only moral agents of this kind can be expected to care *deeply*, share *generously* and help *willingly*.

The hard fact is that moral education cannot be achieved without reference to substantive moral claims. You cannot teach a morality without talking about the cultural, philosophical and ideological viewpoint that *make sense* of morality itself. The goal of keeping public peace is important; but it is not more important than the goal of instilling moral fibre in our students. And if the cost of the peace is denying any basis for social justice, then the price is just too high.

What we need today are *real* teachers of ethics—those who courageously raise the conflicts to consciousness, amplify the issues and refuse artificial resolutions. We need those who will enable students to evaluate the roots of various moral perspectives, induce them to participate respectfully in moral debate, empower them to make autonomous moral judgments and encourage them to make solid moral commitments. But this will never happen while we insist on teaching them that ultimately there *are* no serious moral controversies among Canada’s various cultures and ideologies.

Today, character education is the darling of moral educators in Ontario; but tomorrow we will see if this “emperor” has any clothes. At present, we are trying to create character without reference to moral substance. If our current programs ultimately leave students incapable of sustaining principled ethical commitments, then we will have prepared a new public with greater *empathy* with moral

relativism, an instinctive *respect* for unjust cultures and regimes, and perhaps even a high *tolerance* for cruelty. But then we will have to add “moral education” to our list of oxymorons. ☹

Dr. Stephen L. Anderson teaches at A.B. Lucas S.S. in District 11, Thames Valley. In 2010, he completed his PhD thesis on the Character Education movement.

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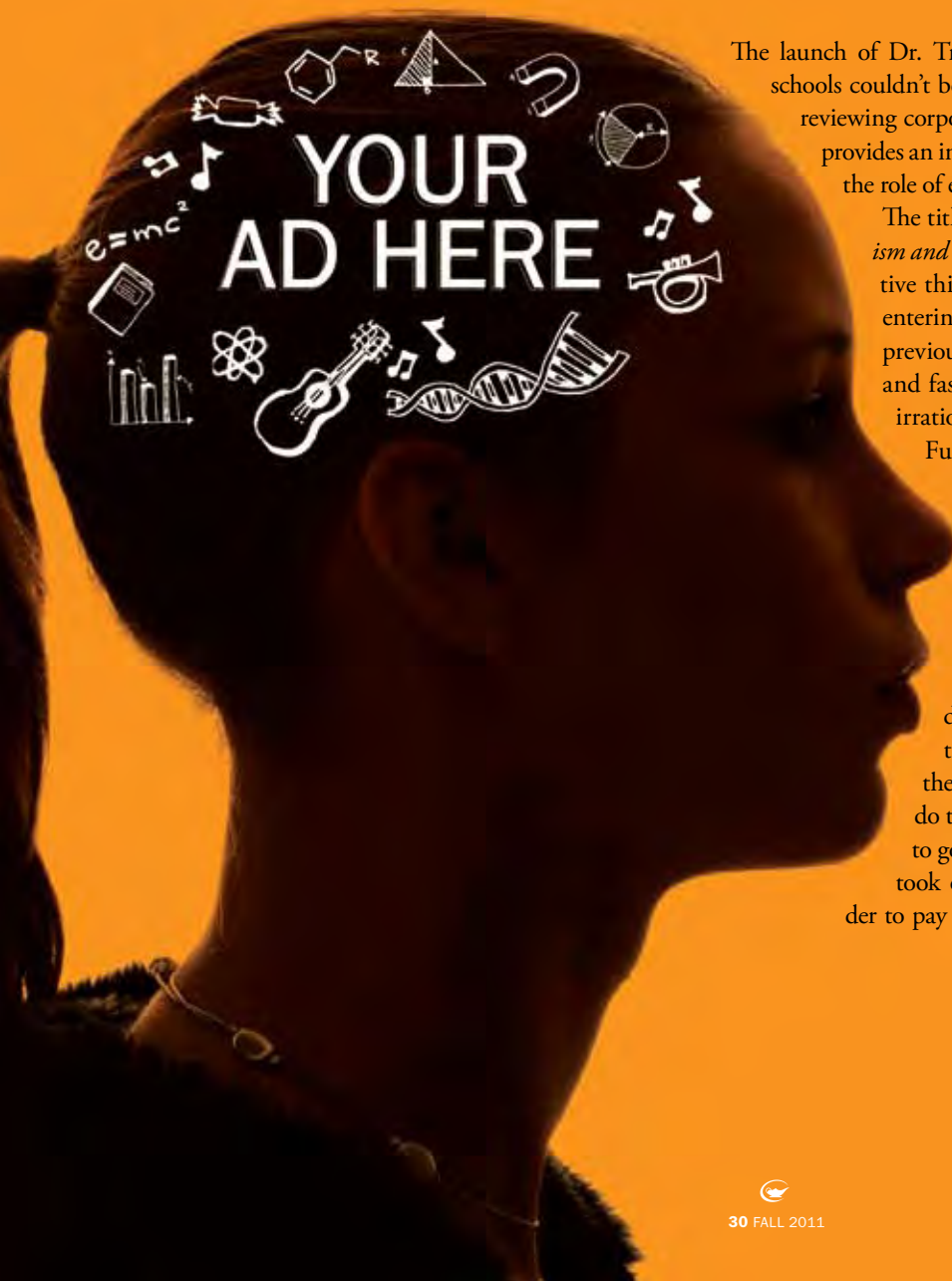
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CONSUMERISM AND EDUCATION

Preventing corporate invasion of our schools

By Chris Glover



The launch of Dr. Trevor Norris's new book on consumerism and schools couldn't be more timely. With the Ministry of Education reviewing corporate-school partnerships this fall, Norris's book provides an in-depth analysis of the issue of consumerism, and the role of education in a democracy.

The title of the book, *Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics*, responds to the neoconservative thinker Frances Fukiyama's assertion that we are entering "the end of history." Fukiyama argued that previous forms of government such as communism and fascism "were characterized by grave defects and irrationalities that led to their eventual collapse." For

Fukiyama, our current system is destined to survive and will represent the end of the historical evolution toward a system without "grave defects or irrationalities."

Norris begs to differ. His book points out the irrationality of our current system. *Consuming Schools* begins with George W. Bush's address to the American people after 9/11. Bush did what many American Presidents had done in times of crisis. In the face of the attack, he rallied the American people to defend their country and to do their patriotic duty, with one twist. He told them to go shopping. For the next seven years, Americans took out subprime mortgages on their homes in order to pay for their trips to the mall. In 2008, after doing

/CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



MERCANTILISME ET ÉDUCATION

Éviter l'invasion de nos écoles par les grandes entreprises

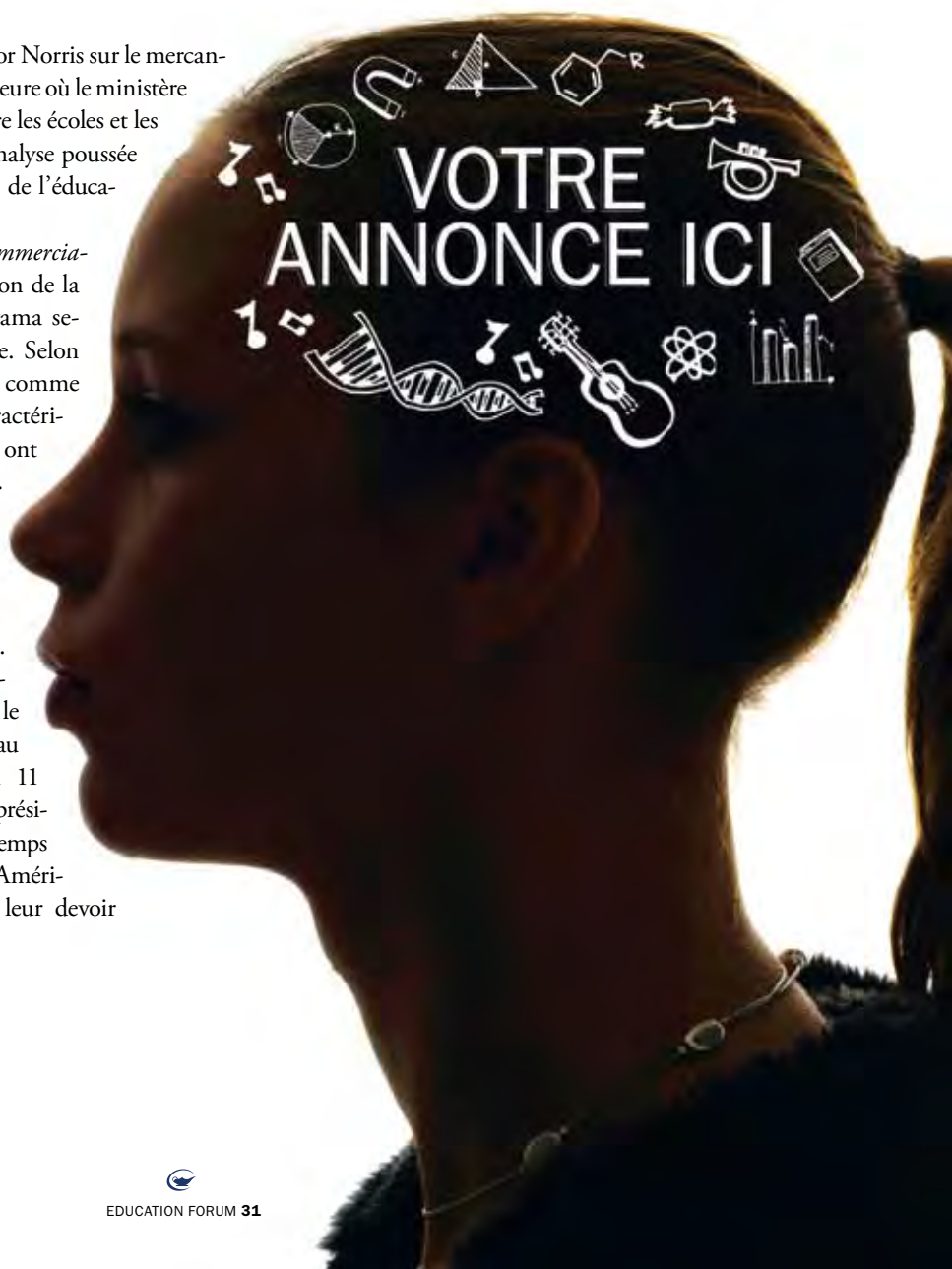
Par Chris Glover

La sortie du nouvel ouvrage du professeur Trevor Norris sur le mercantilisme et les écoles tombe à point nommé. À l'heure où le ministère de l'Éducation doit étudier les partenariats entre les écoles et les grandes entreprises, cet ouvrage fournit une analyse poussée des questions liées au mercantilisme et au rôle de l'éducation dans une démocratie.

L'ouvrage, intitulé : *Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics*, répond à l'assertion de la théoricienne néoconservatrice Frances Fukiyama selon laquelle « la fin de l'histoire » est proche. Selon elle, les anciennes formes de gouvernement, comme le communisme et le fascisme « étaient caractérisées par de graves défauts et absurdités qui ont fini par provoquer leur effondrement ». Pour F. Fukiyama, notre système actuel est destiné à survivre et représentera l'aboutissement de l'évolution historique vers un système sans « graves défauts ni absurdités ».

Trevor Norris s'oppose à cette théorie. Son ouvrage insiste sur l'absurdité de notre système actuel et commence par citer le discours de George W. Bush qui s'adresse au peuple américain suite aux événements du 11 septembre. Bush fit alors ce que nombre de présidents américains avaient choisi de faire en temps de crise. Face à l'attaque, il rassembla les Américains pour défendre leur pays et accomplir leur devoir

/SUITE À LA PAGE 33



Hopefully,
the public
consultations on
school-corporate
partnerships
will point out the
importance of
education
and not allow
education to be
reduced to
one more space
for promoting
consumerism.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30/

their utmost to fulfill their patriotic duty, the American economy collapsed because Americans had shopped themselves to the brink of bankruptcy.

The first few chapters of *Consuming Schools* are a fascinating collection of facts and arguments on how we have become a consumer society. In the 18th century people were defined by their role in the social hierarchy—we were nobles, merchants, or peasants. With the industrial revolution, people were defined by their role in the industrial process—investors, managers, or workers. In the 20th century, with the capability of manufacturing more than we needed, companies created marketing firms to manufacture needs rather than just products. People began to define themselves by the brands they wore. We went from being customers at local stores operated by our neighbours to being consumers in corporate shopping malls. Shopping became a leisure activity, an end in itself commonly touted as a form of therapy. Some of us have even developed an addiction to shopping, and most of us to some degree define ourselves by the brands we drink, eat, or wear.

The advertising that promotes shopping and consumption is everywhere—radios, televisions, the internet, public spaces. In fact, it's now rare to go to the washroom in a restaurant without being confronted with advertising. Marketers have been somewhat less successful at infiltrating Canadian schools, even though according to the CEO of Coca-Cola, "the school system is where you build brand loyalty."

Given access to our schools, what would marketers do? By putting together marketing schemes already in place in American schools, Norris describes what a typical students' day could look like:

The students' day could be planned by the "Council for Corporate and School Partnerships" founded by Coca-Cola. On the school bus, they would be listening to "BusRadio" that pipes commercials to students on school buses. Once at school they may be required by contract to watch 10 minutes of Channel 1, a "news" program that includes three minutes of advertising for junk food, pop and other products. They could then listen to their teacher

sponsored by General Mills, which offers \$250 a month for teachers to act as "freelance brand managers" for Reese puffs. In class, students could study nutrition lessons prepared by Hershey's chocolate, or make Rice Krispies sculptures sponsored by Kellogg's. For an assembly, McDonalds offers "Go Active" an in-school performance with a dazzling light and sound show that teaches students about "healthy nutrition and healthy lifestyles."

Field trips were once used to introduce children to museums, national parks, monuments, and historical sites that symbolize the public sphere. But with funding cuts, it's becoming more difficult to conduct field trips, particularly for schools in low income neighbourhoods. Marketing firms offer a solution. Chicago's "Field Trip Factory" will arrange free field trips for students to local Walmart stores where students can learn about "the computerized retail process, nutritional eating habits, and ways to find good bargains." The "Field Trip Factory" provides permission slips, school buses, store personnel to act as tour guides—and a free bag of merchandise.

We may laugh at the folly of our neighbours to the south, but Norris warns that "for American marketers, the road to schools doesn't detour when it hits the border." Many of our schools have exclusive contracts with Coke or Pepsi to sell their products to students. The University of Calgary's Faculty of Education has a partnership with Imperial Oil. In fact "partnerships," many of them with corporations, are the current buzzword in education circles. But as Norris points out, the partnerships represent a loss for taxpayers because the donations are tax deductible, which means less tax money for schools. Also, ministries of education tend to cut public funding when schools get private funding.

Norris suggests three solutions to counter the encroachment of marketing firms and advertising in schools. First is adequate funding so that schools are not dependent upon advertising to pay for renovations, library books, computers and other school essentials. Second are policies such as Quebec's near total ban on advertising to children. The third solution

/CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



patriotique, néanmoins avec un tour nouveau. Il leur demanda d'aller magasiner. Pendant les sept années qui suivirent, les Américains contractèrent des prêts hypothécaires à risque sur leur maison pour payer leurs visites au centre commercial. En 2008, après avoir fait l'impossible pour accomplir son devoir patriotique, l'économie américaine s'effondra suite au magasinage effréné du peuple qui l'amena au bord de la banqueroute.

Le premier chapitre de l'ouvrage intitulé *Consuming Schools* regroupe une collection fascinante de faits et d'arguments sur la manière dont nous sommes devenus une société de consommation. Au XVIII^e siècle, les gens se définissaient selon leur rôle dans la hiérarchie sociale: nobles, marchands ou paysans. À l'ère de la révolution industrielle, ils se définirent par leur rôle dans le processus industriel: investisseurs, directeurs ou travailleurs. Au XX^e siècle, ayant dorénavant la capacité de produire plus que nécessaire, les compagnies mirent sur pied des sociétés de marketing pour générer des besoins plutôt que des produits. Les gens commencèrent alors à se définir selon les marques qu'ils portaient. Nous sommes passés des clients de boutiques locales gérées par nos voisins à des consommateurs de centres commerciaux dirigés par de grandes entreprises. Le magasinage devint un loisir, une fin en soi souvent érigée au rang de thérapie. Certains d'entre nous devinrent même accros au magasinage et pour la plupart, nous nous définissons, à des degrés divers, par les marques que nous buvons, mangeons ou portons.

La publicité qui incite au magasinage et à la consommation est omniprésente: radios, télévisions, Internet, lieux publics... En fait, il est devenu rare de se rendre aux toilettes d'un restaurant sans être confronté à de la publicité. Les spécialistes du marketing ont eu quelques difficultés à infiltrer les écoles canadiennes, même si, de l'avis du président-directeur général de Coca-Cola, « le système scolaire est le lieu même de la fidélisation à notre marque. »

Que feraient les spécialistes du marketing s'ils avaient libre accès à nos écoles? En regroupant certaines stratégies de marketing déjà à l'œuvre dans les écoles amé-

ricaines, T. Norris décrit à quoi pourrait ressembler la journée type d'un élève.

La journée des élèves serait planifiée par le « Conseil des partenariats écoles-entreprises », fondé par Coca-Cola. Dans l'autobus, ils écouteront « RadioBus » égrener des annonces à leur intention. Une fois à l'école, ils seraient contractuellement contraints de regarder la chaîne 1 pendant dix minutes, un programme de « nouvelles » comprenant trois minutes de publicité pour la malbouffe, les boissons gazeuses et autres produits. Ensuite, ils écouteront leur enseignant, commandité par General Mills, qui offre 250 \$ par mois aux enseignants qui servent de « chefs de produits indépendants » pour les céréales Reese Puffs. En classe, les élèves étudieraient des leçons de nutrition préparées par les chocolats Hershey ou réaliseraient des sculptures en Rice Krispies commanditées par Kellogg. Ensemble, McDonalds leur offrirait sur place un spectacle son et lumière intitulé « Bougez » pour apprendre à « manger sainement » et à « adopter un mode de vie sain ».

Autrefois, les excursions scolaires servaient à présenter aux enfants des musées, des parcs nationaux, des monuments et des sites historiques symbolisant la sphère publique, mais suite aux coupures budgétaires, il est devenu plus difficile d'organiser ce type d'excursions, particulièrement pour les écoles des quartiers défavorisés. Les sociétés de marketing ont la solution: la « *Field Trip Factory* » de Chicago organise des excursions scolaires pour que les élèves visitent les magasins Walmart et puissent découvrir « le processus de vente au détail informatisé, les habitudes nutritionnelles et les moyens de faire de bonnes affaires. » La « *Field Trip Factory* » fournit les billets de sorties, les autobus scolaires, le personnel du magasin qui sert de guide... et un sac de marchandise gratuite.

La déraison de nos voisins du Sud peut nous faire sourire, mais T. Norris nous avertit: « Pour les spécialistes du marketing américains, la route vers les écoles ne fait pas de détour à la frontière. » Nombre de nos écoles ont signé des contrats d'exclusivité avec Coke ou Pepsi pour vendre leurs produits aux élèves. La Faculté

/SUITE À LA PAGE 34

Espérons que
les consultations
publiques sur
les partenariats
écoles-entreprises
montreront
l'importance
de l'éducation
et ne lui
permettront pas
d'être réduite
à un espace
publicitaire
de plus.

is to have students critically investigate consumerism and branding through activities such as “culture jamming”—deconstructing advertisements and turning them into “uncommercials” by revealing their underlying messages.

Chris Glover is a trustee with the Toronto District School Board and an Adjunct Professor at York University.

d'éducation de l'Université de Calgary a un partenariat avec Imperial Oil. En fait, les « partenariats », dont bon nombre sont signés avec de grandes entreprises, sont à la mode dans le milieu éducatif. Cependant, comme le fait remarquer l'auteur, ces partenariats représentent une perte pour les contribuables puisque les dons sont déductibles d'impôt, ce qui réduit les montants reversés aux écoles. De plus, le ministère de l'Éducation a tendance à diminuer les fonds publics lorsque les écoles bénéficient de fonds privés.

Trevor Norris propose trois solutions pour contrer l'empiétement des sociétés de marketing et de la publicité dans les écoles. Tout d'abord, un financement adéquat pour qu'elles ne dépendent pas de la publicité pour payer les rénovations, les livres de la bibliothèque, les ordinateurs ou d'autres matériels scolaires indispensables. Deuxièmement, des politiques comme l'interdiction presque totale de la publicité destinée aux enfants qui est appliquée au Québec et enfin, demander aux élèves de poser une

réflexion critique sur le mercantilisme et les stratégies de marque par le biais d'activités comme le « décryptage culturel » qui déconstruit les annonces publicitaires et en fait des « annonces inversées » en révélant leurs messages sous-jacents.

Comme toujours, notre meilleur espoir tient en la préparation de la génération à venir à s'attaquer aux « graves défauts et absurdités » du système actuel. Venant tout juste d'être père, Trevor Norris nous rappelle que les enfants sont bien plus que des « consommateurs en évolution » et que les jeunes sont « une source constante de nouveauté, un « miracle » par lequel le monde se perpétue... C'est pour cette raison que l'éducation est si importante. » Espérons que les consultations publiques sur les partenariats écoles-entreprises montreront l'importance de l'éducation et ne lui permettront pas d'être réduite à un espace publicitaire de plus. ☺

Chris Glover est conseiller scolaire au *Toronto District School Board* et professeur auxiliaire à l'Université York.



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Images from northern India

Eleanor Alexander teaches Social Sciences at Innisdale Secondary School in District 17, Simcoe. While the school year finds her busy with school and community involvement, during the summer breaks, she spends as much time as possible either traveling or exploring local outdoor areas. Photography serves as a way for her to pause briefly from her activity, in order to take note of and fully appreciate the present moment. These photographs were taken on her long-awaited month-long trip through northern India in the summer of 2010. Aside from being a definite change of pace from her usual day to day life, as well as a test of her resourcefulness, this journey provided Eleanor with the opportunity to meet some very interesting people.

Clockwise from right: Enjoying a moment of calm after a rainstorm, the monkey appeared to be overseeing the path to the temple dedicated to the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman; A family of worshippers at the Golden Temple in Amritsar; Bathers at the Ganges River in Varanasi; The most holy temple for Sikhs, the Golden Temple, Sri Harmandir Sahib, in Amritsar







Rethinking Art & Machine

Left and right sides of the brain uniting to create art

I have seen art that takes my breath away and I can't get enough of the neat gadgets technology has to offer. When you put the two together, however, you get a mind-blowing experience. My recent visit to the Rethinking Art & Machine (RAM) exhibit, featuring artists from the 1960s to present day who have combined art and electronic technology, provided this awesome experience.

Running from September 16, 2011 to January 22, 2012 at THEMUSEUM in downtown Kitchener, the RAM exhibit is one, I believe, all ages can enjoy. As I walked through the exhibit, I was intrigued by the ingenuity of these artists, who had created such interactive pieces of art exploring light, graphics and/or robotics. I was simultaneously mesmerized by one piece and eager to see what came next.

I was surprised by the beauty that Manfred Mohr, considered a pioneer of computer-generated art, found in the logical structure of cubes arranged in part through the rules of geometry. I saw a beautiful art piece that displayed the shadows of birds flying through a chandelier of light, all done through the programming of hundreds of tiny LCD lights. I heard an eerie whispering voice reciting a small part of the *King James Bible* letter by letter—at 3,186,313 characters in total, I am not sure how long I would have been standing there. Both of these pieces were produced by Jim Campbell, an engineer who uses custom-made electronics to explore the relationship between information and knowledge. As I continued to the next room,

I felt the glare of electronic eyes following me while I walked by the works of Alan Rath, who uses motion sensors in his sculptures, allowing for interaction between his art and the audience.

These are just a handful of examples from a wide range of intriguing, thought-provoking artworks combining age-old theoretical principals of art with modern technology. Along with the works of the other artists, who include George Legrady, David Rokeby, Daniel Rozin and Peter Vogel, a real learning experience can be had by students. This exhibit can especially be used as a teaching tool for secondary school courses in visual arts, science and technological education.

The educational programs offered are created by teachers on staff at THEMUSEUM. For each school group, whether it is for the RAM exhibit or any of the permanent and visiting exhibits, they include a pre-visit activity to activate prior knowledge and introduce new concepts; a timeline for THEMUSEUM visit so you know what to expect when you arrive; a post-visit activity that meets an overall expectation from the Ontario curriculum; and a list of curriculum expectations that are covered in your program.

The educational tours set up for the RAM specifically incorporate the Ontario curriculum expectations for grades 9-12 in visual arts. The activities developed for the students include, as its pre-visit activity, taking photos around your school and sending them to artist George Legrady's *Cell Tango*. *Cell Tango*, as explained by THEMUSEUM, opens

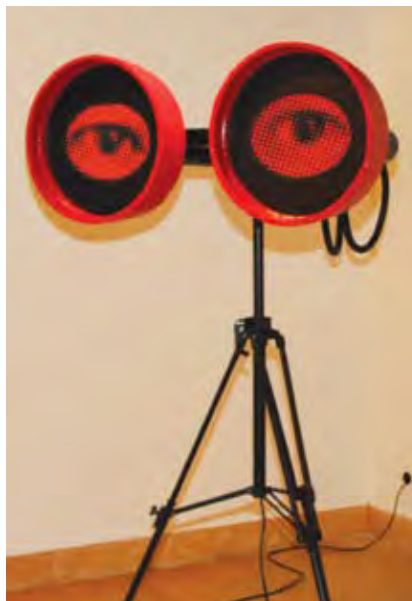
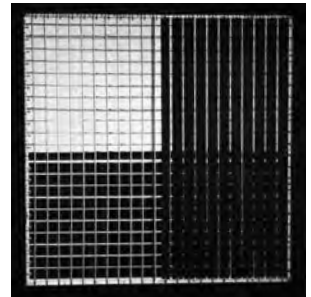
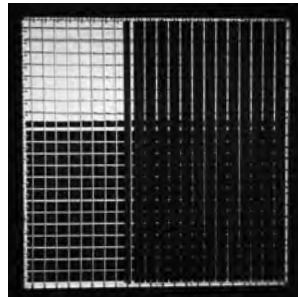
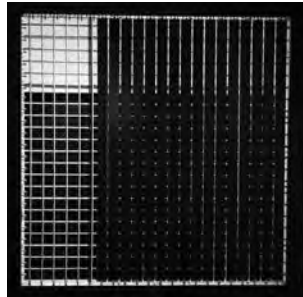
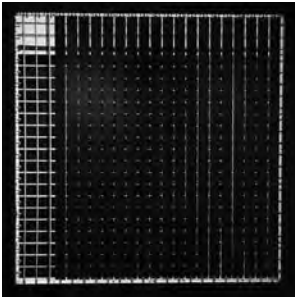
the contribution of content to the global scale as the public can send a cell phone image of their choice from anywhere in the world while the exhibition is running. The images are stored at the Flickr website and featured in the gallery through four different animations projected large scale on THEMUSEUM wall. The images are classified according to the labels added by the public, and the artwork's software juxtaposes found images from Flickr with those contributed by the audience. The artwork's content consists of the play between the public's contributions and the narrative that results from how the images play against each other.

The post-visit activity asks the students to visit the RAM exhibition website www.themuseum.ca/RAM and choose an artist of interest to research. With that research, teachers can arrange group discussions about what message each artist was trying to convey, what technology they used and, finally, have the student create a piece of art with a similar message using different media.

The RAM exhibit is one that shouldn't be missed. It is definitely a worthwhile tool to help teach and intrigue young and old audiences about the fascinating results you can experience combining art and electronic technology.

THEMUSEUM is located at 10 King Street West in Kitchener. Please visit www.themuseum.ca for details on hours and admission. For information on educational workshops, call 519-749-9387 ext. 233 or e-mail education@themuseum.ca. ☺





Top: Visitors can emit tones and music by triggering Peter Vogel's interactive musical structure, *Rhythms of Shadow*, with light and shadow

Middle: Four images showing the transformation of Daniel Rozin's, *X by Y*, as it interacts with the viewer

Bottom: Two views of Alan Rath's, *Voyeur III*, demonstrating the sculpture's motion sensors interacting with its audience

Keeping you in the loop

Reviews, conferences, PD opportunities and other items of interest

BOOK REVIEWS

Words That Start With B

by Vikki VanSickle

Scholastic Canada, 2010

208 pages, \$8.99

Reviewed by Heather Lewis



She had finally arrived—her Grade 7 year, Class 7B, her favourite teacher—or so she thought.

Words That Start With B by Vikki VanSickle takes us on the personal journey of Clarissa Delaney in her Grade 7 year at Ferndale Public School, a year that she had eagerly awaited ever since that day back in Grade 3 when she got caught by Miss Ross on the playground as she attempted to protect a robin's nest from a bunch of bullies. Being in 7B meant being the "Best", finally getting her favourite teacher, Miss Ross, and being in the same class with her best friend, Benji.

This coming-of-age story takes us on Clarissa's journey of self-discovery, mutual respect and a deeper appreciation for the people around her and what

really matters. Clarissa soon begins to learn through her personal trials, both at school and at home, some very difficult but valuable life lessons involving disappointment, frustration, fear, forgiveness and trust.

Vikki VanSickle has cleverly written a very easy to read book with intriguing chapter headings each of which begins with a "B" word. A wide variety of members—child and youth counsellors, social workers, psychologists and educational assistants, to name a few—may find this book particularly useful as a book study in a literacy program or as a resource/tool in small social skills group work for Grade 6 and/or 7 students in general, or with specific students who are faced with the same kinds of challenges as the characters in the book. It is a great example of how middle school students can work through difficulties regarding teachers, parents, friendships and themselves, and learn the hopeful message "You can overcome challenges with the right supports" and "It does get better." This coming-of-age story will resonate with all who read it.

Heather Lewis is a certified Child and Youth Counsellor in the District 20, Halton, Professional Student Services Personnel Bargaining Unit.

C comme Catastrophe de Vikki VanSickle

Texte français de Louise Binette

Scholastic Canada, 2011

208 pages, 14,99 \$

Critique par Heather Lewis

Elle y était enfin arrivée, sa classe de 7^e année, classe 7B, son enseignante préférée, enfin c'est ce qu'elle pensait.

C comme Catastrophe de Vikki VanSickle nous montre le trajet personnel de Clarissa Delaney dans sa classe de 7^e année à l'école publique Ferndale. Elle attendait impatiemment cette année depuis ce jour en 3^e année quand elle s'est fait surprendre dans la cour de l'école par Madame Ross alors qu'elle tentait de protéger le nid d'un

rouge-gorge d'une bande de petites brutes. Être en 7B signifiait être la « meilleure », avoir enfin son enseignante préférée, Madame Ross, et être dans la même classe que son meilleur ami Benji.

Cette histoire nous montre le trajet de Clarissa dans sa découverte d'elle-même, du respect mutuel et d'une appréciation plus profonde des personnes qui l'entourent et de ce qui compte vraiment. Clarissa commence tôt à apprendre de ses épreuves personnelles, tant à l'école qu'à la maison, dont quelques-unes sont des leçons de vie très difficiles, mais importantes mettant en cause la déception, la frustration, la peur, le pardon et la confiance.

Vikki VanSickle a adroitement écrit



un livre très facile à lire contenant des titres de chapitre accrocheurs commençant tous par la lettre « C ». De nombreux membres comme les conseillers à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, les travailleurs sociaux, les psychologues et les éducatrices et éducateurs, pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns, trouveront probablement ce livre particulièrement utile comme livre à étudier dans un programme de littératie ou comme ressource/outil dans un petit groupe d'apprentissage social pour des élèves de 6^e et (ou) de 7^e année en général ou avec des élèves précis qui sont confrontés aux mêmes genres de défis que les personnages du livre. C'est un excellent exemple de la façon dont les élèves des écoles intermédiaires peuvent surmonter les

difficultés concernant le personnel enseignant, les parents, les camarades et eux-mêmes et apprendre du message d'espoir « oui, la vie est pleine d'épreuves et de catastrophes... mais rien n'est insurmontable. » Cette histoire d'actualités touchera tous ceux qui la liront.

Heather Lewis est conseillère diplômée auprès des enfants et des jeunes au District 20, Halton, unité de négociation du personnel professionnel des services à l'élève

**Why Don't Students Like School?
A Cognitive Scientist Answers
Questions About How the Mind Works
and What It Means for the Classroom.**
by **Daniel T. Willingham**

Jossey-Bass 2009

192 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by Karen Allin

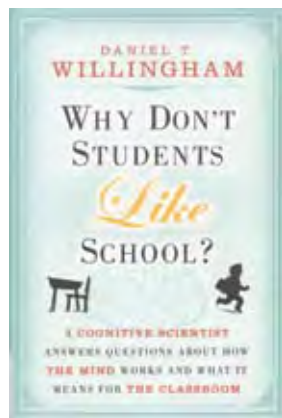
Daniel T. Willingham's book *Why Don't Students Like School? A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom* is based on principles for teaching and learning. This is not the typical "brain research shows..." book, but rather a practical book for educators—not heavy on the technical side and easy to read. Willingham, a psychology professor at the University of Virginia, tells us why students do not like certain aspects of school and what we can do as educators to alleviate this problem.

In each chapter, Willingham poses a question, answers it using empirical studies from the field of cognitive science and then gives numerous implications for the classroom. His examples are easy to understand and not filled with typical "edubabble."

Chapters include such topics as:

- Why Do Students Remember Everything That's on Television and Forget Everything I Say?
- Why Is It So Hard for Students to Understand Abstract Ideas?
- How Should I Adjust My Teaching for Different Types of Learners?

The author informs us that everyone is naturally curious and enjoys solving problems. However, the degree of pleasure that we gain from solving a Sudoku or a crossword puzzle is not always the same pleasure gained from solving an algebra question. If we are stuck on the crossword puzzle and someone gives us the answer, the degree of pleasure drops significantly. There is a difference between solving the problem on our own and being told what to do. The same applies for many students who don't like school because the schoolwork often seems too difficult for them and they are constantly told what to do, and thus they do not experience many of the



pleasure situations of learning.

Students like a class when they are presented with an interesting and challenging problem and they have the necessary tools to solve the problem. Students also like a class when the teacher seems to be a nice person, and the material being presented is well organized and easy to understand.

This book was interesting to read and gave me many things to think about when I plan my lessons and teach my classes. I highly recommend this book for all educators, new and experienced. Additional information about Willingham's research can be found on his website: www.danielwillingham.com. There are articles addressing why transfer is hard, why students remember or forget, and

why students think they understand when they don't.

Karen Allin teaches in District 19, Peel, and was the 2010-11 Vice-chair of the Curriculum, Resources and Research Subcommittee of the OSSTF/FEESO Educational Services Committee.

KEEN FOR LEARNING Why Some Kids Don't Succeed in the Classroom—and What We Can Do About It

by **Dr. Edmond J. Dixon**

Wintertickle Press, 2010

210 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by Kristina Rivard Gobbo

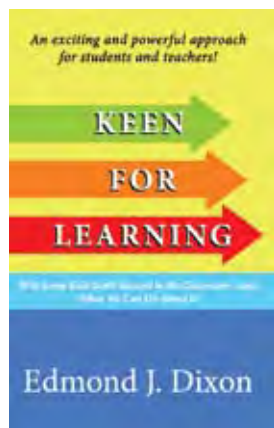
KEEN FOR LEARNING Why Some Kids Don't Succeed in the Classroom—and What We Can Do About It is a captivating and resource-rich book. Its author, Dr. Edmond J. Dixon, presents the struggles of students who are disengaged, unmotivated and lack the drive to succeed and for whom educators try to provide intrinsic motivation and to relay the message that they do have the potential and the ability to succeed. He provides grade-specific strategies in a step-by-step fashion. The resource is divided into three sections describing the challenges that occur in the classroom, how to implement KEEN Differentiated Learning and the six strategies that can be presented to students.

Dixon believes that the classroom "should be the most exciting place in the school," and so he provides the tools that he feels are necessary to generate student interest and their willingness to participate. In the first chapter, Dixon states, "We need to use teaching strategies that help [students] make meaning." He discusses in section two how to create meaningful work that meets students' learning styles, addresses multiple intelligences and is hands-on. Such work, he argues, will help students become passionate learners with an innate desire to stay on task, regardless of extrinsic motivating factors.

He calls this the KEEN Strategy (Kinesthetics, Endorphinal Release, Experiential

Perspective-taking, Narrative) and he emphasizes why this strategy works and how a classroom can be converted into an environment of fun and play. The four components “are successful because they provide the criteria for meaningful work connected to the curriculum...by addressing a variety of learning styles within the context of one activity; and they keep students—and their brains—considerably more engaged.” Classroom design and setup is discussed as one of the key elements in enhancing the KEEN process as it moves from the direction of the teacher to the students working collaboratively in the classroom.

The six KEEN teaching techniques, outlined in detail highlighting the focus of the lesson, hints to the teacher and followup activities, have been tested with thousands of students and many



teachers have successfully implemented these methods in both elementary and secondary classrooms. Additional information about this teaching strategy can be found at www.keenforlearning.org.

Kristina Rivard Gobbo was presented this year with the Rainbow District School Board's Teacher of the Year Award. She recently completed her Master of Education on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Dogsled Dreams
by Terry Lynn Johnson
4RV Publishing, 2010
141 pages, \$17.95
Reviewed by Teri Treftlin

This debut novel by outdoorswoman and former dogsledder Terry Lynn Johnson

appeals to a variety of readers. From the opening scene involving a thrilling dogsled ride to the dreams and adventures of the 12-year-old protagonist, Rebecca, preteens and their parents will be caught up in Johnson's glimpses of life in rural northwestern Ontario.

Johnson's intimate knowledge of the dogs she describes is real, heartwarming and often humorous. From puppy antics during a school visit and the bond that forms between the dogs and their handler, to peeing on Rebecca's sleeping bag on a camping trip, you just never know what they are going to do next! There is enough technical language from the sport of dogsledding to be educational, but not so much to be tedious and lose the reader. Johnson's descriptions of driving dogs down a trail engage the reader and trans-



port him or her to a seat on the sled or on the runners with the driver.

Terry Lynn Johnson's description of how Rebecca relates to her complicated life—a new step-mom, the math homework she hates, and the drama and romances that occur amongst adolescent friends and school peers—is genuine. The mysterious disappearance of a dog from the team will intrigue the male readers, as will Rebecca's quest to become a young dogsled racer. This is a story that kids will relate to and want to read more than once, parents will enjoy, and both elementary and secondary teachers can use in their classrooms to engage at-risk readers. *Dogsled Dreams* is a high-impact and very readable novel.

For teachers, Johnson offers an easy-to-use free online teaching guide written

by Natalie Dias Lorenzi, at her website, www.terrylynnjohnson.com/teachers-guide/. It comes complete with pre-reading activities, crucial vocabulary, topics for discussion and relevant curriculum-based expectations. The guide covers multidisciplinary approaches useful to bringing literacy to a variety of subject areas, including Geography, Social Sciences, Math and English. Differentiated learners are anticipated, and instruction activities are suggested to meet a variety of students' needs, including culminating activity ideas. There are online links as well, tying the novel back to real-life adventures in dog ownership and dogsled racing. At the secondary level, Johnson's novel and teaching guide would be applicable for use in Applied or Essential Level English classes for either Grade 9 or 10.

Teri Treftlin teaches English at Geraldton Composite High School in District 6B, Superior North.

CONFERENCES

OSSTF/FEESO Regional Symposia
Tools for Wellness:
Managing the Stress in our Lives
Outils pour le mieux-être :
Gérer le stress dans nos vies

14 novembre 2011
[Francophone \(Ottawa\)](#)
November 15, 2011
[Region 5 \(Ottawa\)](#)
December 9, 2011
[Region 3 \(London\)](#)
February 3, 2012
[Region 2 \(Sault Ste. Marie\)](#)
March 29, 2012
[Region 4 \(Toronto\)](#)
May 4, 2012
[Region 1 \(Thunder Bay\)](#)

This year we are offering two great workshops to help you learn about the tools you need to handle stress.

Keys to Financial Wellness—Educator's Financial Group: In our 90-minute Financial Wellness Workshop, we'll provide you with the information you need to help you feel more in control of your



financial situation—helping you reduce stress and build a happier and more financially secure future.

Stress Management Through Humour: Sometimes we feel overwhelmed with stress. We become so tired and we lose all our enthusiasm. Everything begins to look grey! Andrée Jetté, a charismatic speaker with a passion for neuroscience and quantum physics, will present effective and simple ways to let go of your stress, build back your power and find your joy again! She will help us to identify the four types of stress: physical, intellectual, emotional and situational, and offer simple, practical tools for dealing with stress while providing a humorous look at life.

Registration details will be posted at www.osstf.on.ca prior to each event.

November 18-19, 2011

OHASSTA 2011

Holiday Inn Select, Toronto Airport

The Ontario History and Social Sciences Teachers' Association invites all history and social sciences teachers who are interested in new and innovative teaching practices and current trends in the discipline to attend its annual conference. Guest speakers for this year's conference are Lawrence Hill, celebrated Canadian author of seven books, including *Any Known Blood* and the internationally acclaimed *The Book of Negroes*, and *Toronto Star* editorial cartoonist Theo Moudakis, whose work has appeared in most major Canadian newspapers as well as the *New York Times*. For workshop descriptions and registration details, please visit ohassta.org.

December 7-9, 2011

CESBA Conference – Building Community Through Adult, Alternative and Continuing Education Courtyard by Marriott, Downtown Toronto

The annual CESBA fall conference provides valuable professional development for educators and administrators involved in all aspects of adult, continuing or alternative education, whether it be adult credit, adolescent alternative, ESL/FLS/LINC/CLIC, LBS, IE, IL, PSW or ESD programming. This conference,

comprising four pre-conference forums, 30 workshops and nine networking sessions, has been organized around the fundamental concept that, by developing a sense of belonging, CESBA members will become “builders of community.” To accomplish that, this conference provides delegates with extraordinary opportunities for conversation, commitment and connecting. For workshop descriptions and registration details, please visit www.cesba.com.

February 1-4, 2012

OLA Super Conference 2012

Metro Toronto Convention Centre

The Ontario Library Association's Super Conference 2012 features over 200 plenary, spotlight and workshop sessions, the all-new “Super Saturday” program and unlimited entrance privileges to EXPO 2012, Canada's largest library tradeshow. In the spirit of innovation, the Saturday conference program will experiment with a new approach—fewer concurrent workshops—all addressing bigger themes and ideas. For workshop descriptions and registration details, please visit www.accessola.com.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Differentiated Instruction: An Annotated Bibliography

The OSSTF/FEESO Educational Services Committee has created an annotated bibliography of several publications dealing with Differentiated Instruction and addressing issues of curriculum development, lesson planning, instruction and assessment. It can be accessed at www.osstf.on.ca/DI.

Teacher Learning and Leadership Program

The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) is an annual project-based professional learning opportunity for experienced classroom teachers.

The program funds proposals from classroom teachers who seek a peer leadership role in curriculum, instructional practice or supporting other teachers. The goal of the program is to provide an

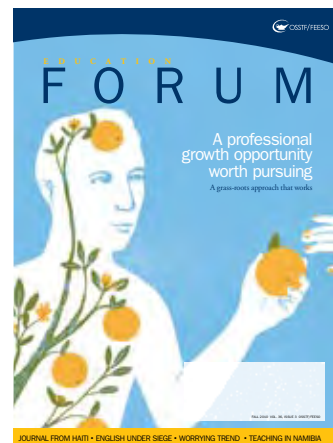
opportunity for teachers to engage in advanced professional learning and to share their learning with others.

Since its launch in 2007, the ministry has supported hundreds of teacher-led TLLP projects. The project archive at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/search.asp can be searched by theme, keywords



and grade levels to view completed projects, along with contact information to communicate with the project leaders.

Two such projects were highlighted in recent issues of *Education Forum*. The spring 2011 issue included the article “Creating positive space” about the



launch of a new support network and a range of resources to help teachers and education workers build confidence and proficiency in anti-homophobia education. The article “A professional growth opportunity worth pursuing” in the fall 2010 issue describes how the Adult High School in Ottawa-Carleton uses a graphic novel project to increase student literacy. ☺



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UNEXPECTED GAPS.
ESPECIALLY YOU.



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educators and their families, we have an intimate understanding of your unique financial needs and goals. To chat with a specialist about your pension income, or any other financial-related topic, call **1.800.263.9541**, or visit us online.

———— PLANNING • INVESTING • LENDING ————

**Last word****by Ken Coran, President****Mot de la fin****par Ken Coran, Président**

A strong collective voice

Essential to successful negotiations

IT has been a very busy start to the new school year with the provincial election having taken place just four weeks after most of us returned to work. We have a newly elected government and legislature that look very different from the last ones and that will be facing immediate challenges given the political and economic climates, not just in Ontario, but around the world. The minority government, led by the Liberals, has 53 seats, the Progressive Conservatives have 37 seats and the New Democrats hold the balance with 17 seats.

I want to thank all of you who answered the call to get involved and/or vote in the provincial election. We needed to elect progressive members of government who care about public education, who value the education team and who understand that education is Ontario's best investment. With only 49 per cent of eligible voters casting their votes, the lowest in our history, your participation in the provincial election has already made a difference in what publicly funded education will look like in the future.

Prior to the provincial election, OSSTF/FEESO knew that one of the first issues that we would have to discuss with the newly elected government would be the 2012 round of collective bargaining. With 95 per cent of our collective agreements expiring August 31, 2012, we understood that creating the best bargaining environment started with members being actively involved in the provincial election and that, post-election, it would be about actively building relationships at all levels and effectively communicating our priorities.

To begin that process, I have sent letters to the Premier and to the leaders of the Progressive Conservative and New Democratic parties, congratulating them on their campaigns. I also advised the Premier that we were looking forward to the appointment of his Cabinet and to a continued positive working relationship with all ministries and, in particular, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We hope that we will be able to meet with those individuals at the earliest opportunity to discuss current and time-sensitive issues such as 2012 bargaining, as well as long-term strategies to continue to strengthen and improve publicly funded education in Ontario.

Une solide voix collective

Essentielle à la réussite des négociations

LE début de la nouvelle année scolaire a été très occupé, car les élections provinciales se sont déroulées seulement quatre semaines après le retour au travail de la plupart d'entre nous. Nous avons un gouvernement nouvellement élu; l'assemblée législative est très différente de la précédente et elle sera confrontée à des défis immédiats étant donné les climats politiques et économiques, non seulement en Ontario, mais partout dans le monde. Le gouvernement minoritaire, dirigé par les Libéraux, détient 53 sièges, les Progressistes-Conservateurs en ont 37 et les Néo-démocrates ont le reste, soit 17 sièges.

Je tiens à remercier chacun d'entre vous qui avez répondu à l'appel de vous impliquer et (ou) de voter aux élections provinciales. Nous devons élire un gouvernement progressiste en faveur d'un système d'éducation publique, qui valorise l'équipe scolaire et qui comprend que l'éducation est le meilleur investissement pour l'Ontario. Avec seulement 49 pour cent des électeurs admissibles qui ont exercé leur droit de vote, le taux le plus bas dans notre histoire, votre participation dans le cadre de l'élection provinciale, a déjà fait la différence dans l'avenir de l'éducation financée à même les deniers.

Avant l'élection provinciale, OSSTF/FEESO savait que l'un des premiers enjeux que nous aurions à discuter avec le nouveau gouvernement serait la ronde de négociation de 2012. Puisque 95 pour cent de nos conventions collectives viennent à échéance le 31 août 2012, nous étions conscients que pour créer un contexte propice aux négociations, il fallait commencer par la participation active des membres aux élections provinciales et qu'une fois terminées, il faudrait établir des liens à tous les niveaux et communiquer efficacement nos priorités.

Pour entreprendre ce processus, j'ai envoyé des lettres au Premier ministre et aux chefs des partis progressiste-conservateur et néo-démocrate dans le but de les féliciter pour leurs campagnes. J'ai aussi informé le Premier ministre que nous attendons avec impatience la nomination de son Cabinet et la poursuite de relations de travail positives avec tous les ministères et en particulier avec les ministres de l'Éducation et celui de la Formation, des Collèges et Universités. Nous espérons pouvoir rencontrer toutes ces personnes dans les plus brefs délais afin de discuter des enjeux actuels



Now, we turn our efforts to preparing for bargaining and ensuring that we have a strong collective voice. Neither the way we will bargain nor the bargaining process is yet known, however, in 2012, we are looking at doing things differently—at redefining how we proceed. To protect our members, to be progressive, we cannot be static or entrenched in doing things the way we always have. With so many agreements expiring at the same time, there is an opportunity to make enhancements not available at other times. As a result, OSSTF/FEESO is putting

In order to be successful,
we must all be well-prepared
and well-informed
and we must also ensure
that we are all working
towards the same goals.

energy into “empowering” our local teams to provide the expertise, the resources and the supports they need to effectively bargain at the local level.

Training and team-building will continue to be a priority during the fall, winter and spring Collective Bargaining Committee (CBC) regionals. We also have one additional full day of training scheduled for the spring regionals and, in February, there will also be an expanded CBC/Provincial Executive Negotiating Conference. It will feature an additional day of training and the participation of District and Bargaining Unit Presidents.

OSSTF/FEESO’s strategy for this upcoming round of bargaining is predicated on our strength: you, our members. In order to be successful, we must all be well-prepared and well-informed and we must also ensure that we are all working towards the same goals. Most importantly, we must all be involved and build an effective and efficient team. Throughout the coming year, I ask you to stay informed and encourage you to get involved at your local workplace or bargaining unit. Finally, I ask you to support your local leaders and bargaining teams as they work on your behalf.

OSSTF/FEESO has always led the way in bargaining and will continue to do so in 2012. We know action is what it takes to get the job done for our members. We know actions speak louder than words and we know action has made OSSTF/FEESO 92 years strong. ☺

et urgents comme la négociation 2012 ainsi que les stratégies à long terme pour continuer à consolider et à améliorer le système d’éducation financé à même les deniers publics en Ontario.

Nous dirigeons maintenant nos efforts à se préparer en vue des négociations et à s’assurer d’avoir une solide voix collective. Ni la manière dont nous négocierons ni le processus n’est encore connu, mais en 2012, nous voulons faire les choses différemment... nous voulons redéfinir le processus. Afin de protéger nos membres et d’être progressiste, nous ne pouvons pas nous asseoir sur nos lauriers ou être fermement ancrés dans notre façon de faire les choses toujours de la même manière. Avec autant de conventions collectives qui viendront à échéance en même temps, il y a des possibilités d’améliorations qui ne sont pas disponibles en d’autres temps. Pour cette raison, OSSTF/FEESO concentre son énergie à donner les moyens à ses équipes locales d’offrir les expertises, les ressources et le soutien dont elles ont besoin pour négocier avec succès à tous les échelons.

La formation et l’esprit d’équipe continueront d’être une priorité lors des rencontres régionales de l’automne, de l’hiver et du printemps du Comité de négociation collective. Nous avons aussi une journée complète additionnelle de formation prévue pendant les rencontres régionales du printemps et en février, il y aura une conférence élargie de négociation collective du CNC/Exécutif provincial. Elle comportera une journée additionnelle de formation et de participation des présidences d’unité de négociation et de district.

Pour réussir, nous devons tous être
bien préparés et bien informés et nous
devons aussi nous assurer que nous
visons tous les mêmes objectifs.

La stratégie d’OSSTF/FEESO pour les prochaines rondes de négociation repose sur notre force : vous, nos membres. Pour réussir, nous devons tous être bien préparés et bien informés et nous devons aussi nous assurer que nous visons tous les mêmes objectifs. Ce qui est le plus important, c’est que nous devons tous participer et mettre sur pied une équipe productive et compétente. Tout au long de la prochaine année, je vous demande de vous tenir informé et je vous encourage à vous impliquer au sein de votre lieu de travail ou de votre unité de négociation. Enfin, je vous demande d’appuyer vos dirigeants locaux et vos équipes de négociation, car ils travaillent pour vous.

OSSTF/FEESO a toujours été le chef de file en matière de négociation et nous continuerons dans cette voie en 2012. Nous savons que l’action, c’est ce dont nous avons besoin pour accomplir la tâche pour nos membres. Nous savons que l’action est plus forte que les paroles et nous savons aussi que l’action, c’est ce qui a fait la force d’OSSTF/FEESO pendant 92 ans. ☺

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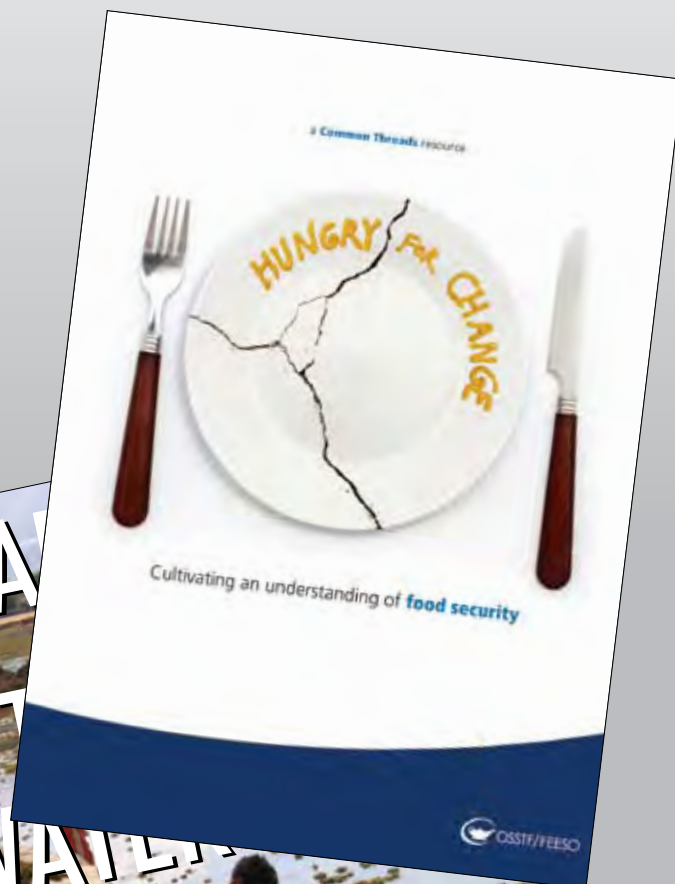
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