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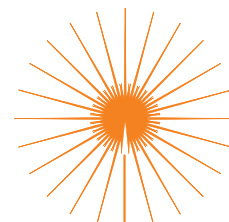
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Openers

By Wendy Anes Hirschegger

On genuine accomplishments in meaningful work

In the last issue of *Education Forum* (Winter 2008), former Deputy Minister of Education Ben Levin contributed an article entitled, “Student Failure: Another Side of the Story” in which he states, “Our goal in schools should—must—be success for all students, where success means genuine accomplishment in meaningful work. Everything we do should focus on what it takes to support students in learning more, getting better and becoming more confident in their own capabilities.”

In this issue, we present articles that illustrate how educational workers are doing just that: supporting students in their learning and providing meaningful learning experiences.

Rod Heikkila, in “Sir, I Can Read Just Fine, But I Hate Books,” explores how electronic media affects some students’ desire to read. We need to provide students with tools to step from Facebook to real books. Heikkila’s thoughtful analysis of current electronic media, which references Marshall McLuhan’s theories of how the electronic world would change society, shows that educators must constantly adapt to students’ ever-changing reality to ensure they do gain the knowledge and skills to succeed.

Sophie Boyer further illustrates Heikkila’s concepts in “Graphic Novels to the Rescue.” Boyer gives us well-researched and proven, practical advice on how to use this popular form of fiction to draw reluctant readers of all abilities into the world of books. Not only will they discover the pleasures of reading, they will also learn invaluable lessons in visual and media literacy and life skills.

Another strategy to reach students and help them to become confident in their own abilities is to bring the real world into the classroom, give them the skills to tackle real world issues and

show them how their peers have made a difference in the lives of others. One study option is the philosophy espoused by Craig and Marc Kielburger in their organizations Free The Children and Leaders Today. The article “From Me to We” describes the impact that this philosophy had on the delegates to OSSTF/FEESO’s Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly, March 2008, where Marc Kielburger delivered the keynote

Engaged
students do
succeed and
can inspire
others to
succeed as well

address on behalf of his brother Craig. The Kielburgers have made a real difference in the lives of school children all over the world—a testament to the fact that engaged students do succeed and can inspire others to succeed as well.

Also in this issue, there are several articles that speak to the necessity of making education truly meaningful and not just an “at any cost” exercise in raising test scores and lowering dropout rates.

Jim Neill’s article “EQAO and the Mismeasure of Education” is a hard-hitting critique of the current practice of testing every student, every year, in the grades for which EQAO tests are prescribed. He answers the question, “test-

ing for what purpose, at what cost, and to what end?” He asserts that when a testing culture takes hold, and raising scores becomes more important than a well-rounded and rich educational experience, perhaps it is time to step back and ask whether there is a better way to do this. Neill explains that the current manner in which EQAO testing is administered does not give us the intended results, and that the results we do get are being misused by “piranhas” in right-wing think tanks (see *Education Forum*, Winter 2008), and the pressures to “raise the scores” are causing the learning experiences of students to be diluted to simply test-taking skills.

Similarly, Jon Cowans in “Student Absenteeism” and Adam Mercer in “Education is Like a Tree of Knowledge” speculate on other misplaced energies. Cowans argues that when educational workers must spend too much time and energy chasing truants due to the lack of adequate human resources and tools, education as a whole suffers. Mercer bemoans the tendency to focus on isolated areas of education, rather than the fundamentals necessary to nourish the whole of education.

Finally, Andrea Wobick’s article “Struggles in Tanzania: Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions” reminds us, that despite our concerns and challenges around public education here in Ontario, there are parts of the world where the challenges facing students and teachers are far more serious and far more daunting than any issues we may confront.

The strength of the public education system in Ontario is illustrated by the commitment to students and to their learning conditions portrayed in these articles. There is much to ponder in this issue. I hope you enjoy it. 🐦





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Mot de l'éditrice

par Wendy Anes Hirschegger

De vraies réalisations par l'entremise d'un travail valorisant

Dans le dernier numéro d'*Education Forum*, Ben Levin, ancien sous-ministre de l'Éducation, a rédigé un article intitulé « *Student Failure: Another Side of the Story* » dans lequel il déclare : « Le but de nos écoles devrait – doit – être la réussite de tous les élèves où la réussite signifie de vraies réalisations par l'entremise d'un travail valorisant. Tout ce que nous faisons devrait être axé sur ce qui est nécessaire pour appuyer les élèves à apprendre, à s'améliorer et à avoir davantage confiance en leurs propres capacités. »

Les articles de ce numéro de la revue montrent comment les travailleuses et travailleurs en éducation font ce qu'il faut pour soutenir les élèves dans leur apprentissage et leur offrir des expériences d'apprentissage valorisantes.

L'article de Rod Heikkilä, « *Sir, I Can Read Just Fine, But I Hate Books* » examine comment la presse électronique a agi sur l'envie de lire des élèves et nous recommande d'offrir aux élèves des outils pour s'éloigner de *Facebook* et utiliser de vrais livres. Son analyse réfléchie de la presse électronique actuelle, à la lumière des théories de Marshall McLuhan sur la façon dont le monde branché changerait la société, nous prouve que nous devons sans cesse nous adapter à la réalité en constante évolution des élèves avec lesquels nous travaillons afin de s'assurer qu'ils acquièrent les connaissances et les aptitudes dont ils ont besoin pour réussir dans la vie.

Dans la même veine, l'article de Sophie Boyer « *Graphic Novels to the Rescue* » nous donne des conseils pratiques, éprouvés et bien documentés sur l'utilisation de cette forme populaire de fiction pour attirer les lecteurs réticents de tous les niveaux intellectuels au monde

des livres. Ils découvriront non seulement les plaisirs de la lecture, mais ils en tireront aussi des expériences inestimables en matière de connaissances de base et médiatiques. Cet article décrit admirablement les concepts que Rod Heikkilä présente si bien dans son article.

Enseigner aux élèves à s'attaquer aux problèmes mondiaux afin d'influencer la

Des élèves
impliqués
peuvent réussir
et servir
d'inspiration
pour le succès
des autres

vie des autres est une autre façon d'atteindre les élèves et de les aider à avoir davantage confiance en leurs propres capacités. Une façon de le faire est d'adopter la philosophie qui guide Craig et Marc Kielburger dans leurs groupes Enfants Entraide (*Free The Children*) et *Leaders Today*. L'article « Du moi au nous » décrit l'impact que cette philosophie a eu sur les délégués à la Réunion annuelle de l'Assemblée provinciale en mars à laquelle Marc Kielburger a prononcé un discours en remplacement de Craig qui a eu un contretemps. Les frères Kielburger font réellement une différence dans la vie des écoliers partout dans le monde, ce qui renforce l'idée que des élèves

impliqués peuvent réussir et servir d'inspiration pour le succès des autres.

Plusieurs autres articles évoquent la nécessité de rendre l'éducation vraiment valorisante et non pas seulement un exercice d'augmentation des résultats des tests et de diminution des taux de décrochage à tout prix.


Jim Neill, dans son article intitulé « *EQAO and the Mismeasure of Education* » critique durement la pratique actuelle d'évaluation de tous les élèves à chaque année dans les niveaux prescrits par les tests de l'OQRE. Il répond à la question « Évaluer dans quel but, à quel prix et à quelle fin? » Il affirme que lorsque la culture d'évaluation s'établit et que l'augmentation des notes devient plus importante qu'une expérience d'apprentissage riche et bien équilibrée, il est peut-être temps de prendre du recul et de se demander s'il y a une meilleure manière d'y arriver. Jim Neill explique que la façon dont les tests de l'OQRE sont administrés ne nous donne pas les résultats voulus. De plus, il y a une distorsion des résultats par des centres d'études et de recherches de droite comme le *Fraser Institute* qui les utilisent à des fins inappropriées. Les pressions pour « augmenter les notes » réduisent l'apprentissage des élèves à l'accumulation de connaissances pour seulement réussir un examen.

De même, Jon Cowans dans son article « *Student Absenteeism* » et Adam Mercer dans « *Education is Like a Tree of Knowledge* » s'interrogent sur d'autres énergies mal placées. Jon Cowans soutient que lorsque les travailleuses et travailleurs en éducation doivent consacrer trop de temps et d'énergie à courir après les élèves absents parce qu'on ne fournit pas les ressources humaines appropriées et les outils, l'éducation au complet en



souffre. Quant à lui, Adam Mercer se lamente sur la tendance à se concentrer sur des parties isolées de l'éducation plutôt que sur les principes de base nécessaires qui constituent le fondement de toute l'éducation.

Enfin, l'article d'Andrea Wobick intitulé « *Struggles in Tanzania: Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions* » nous rappelle que malgré nos préoccupations et les défis en ce qui concerne l'éducation publique en Ontario, il existe dans une partie du monde des élèves et du personnel enseignant qui sont confrontés à des problèmes beaucoup plus graves et beaucoup plus intimidants.

L'engagement envers les élèves et leurs conditions d'apprentissage qui se retrouvent dans ces articles prouve que nous avons un système d'éducation publique solide en Ontario. Somme toute, ce numéro porte beaucoup à réfléchir. J'espère qu'il vous plaira. 



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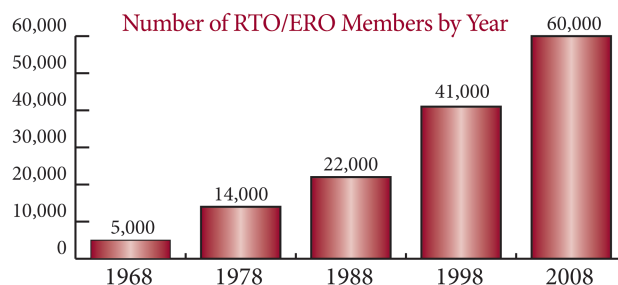


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On a Global Front

By Andrea Wobick

Struggles in Tanzania

Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions



Every day, Canadian teacher Shannon Howlett walks into her primary school classroom to find anywhere from 60 to 100 students waiting. Her school, Ilkurot Primary School, is in a Maasai village approximately 30 kms outside of Arusha, Tanzania. It could be worse; on some days, Ilkurot Primary School's nursery class has as many as 170 children and just one teacher.

Overcrowded classrooms are not the only challenge contributing to a decline in working conditions for Tanzanian teachers. Resources too are being stretched too thin, in this, one of the world's poorest countries, negatively impacting educators and the education system.

There is no doubt that the creation in 2002 of free, universal primary education in Tanzania was necessary and desirable.

Education is a critical element in the eradication of poverty, and for development. However, the government's commitment to improve education has been undercut by its failure to dedicate adequate resources to improve the plight of the country's teachers.

As of 2004, teacher salaries in Tanzania ranged from 70,000 to 120,000 Tanzanian shillings (approximately C\$64-C\$109) per month, depending on seniority, experience and education. There has been little improvement in the rates of pay since 2004. Payments are often late, and many promised benefits, such as holiday travel benefits, often-times don't materialize. Teachers pay a premium for health benefits that they often don't receive. Even with the country's relatively low cost of living,

teacher salaries are not high enough for teachers to support themselves and their families.

The government's failure to pay a decent wage, on schedule, forces many teachers to rely on other sources of employment. This, in turn, diminishes the time they can devote to their students in the classroom and to lesson planning, marking and the multitude of tasks that make up a teacher's working life. Such low pay does not reflect the teachers' role as the most critical players in the fight to eradicate poverty in the country.

Teachers in Tanzania have little say as to where they will work. Their employment is based on the condition that they agree to work anywhere in the county.

For example, at Ilkurot Primary School, all students are Maasai, a nomadic group indigenous to Tanzania that has, in large part, maintained its traditional way of life. Maasai children grow up speaking Maasai and most don't learn Swahili (the language of instruction for primary school) until they reach primary school. Despite this, just one of Howlett's 14 colleagues at Ilkurot Primary School is Maasai.

In a culture where ties to the community are important, and where individuals maintain strong links to their extended families and to the practices and traditions of their indigenous group, this has a critical impact on both educators and students.

Not only does the failure of the government to keep teachers in their own communities isolate them from their social and cultural network, it creates a cultural gap between students and teachers. Placing teachers in schools where they have no ties to the community removes the students' chances of finding a role model they can relate to, and deprives teachers of developing a long-term vested interest in seeing students succeed.

The combination of low salaries and relatively high travel costs means that teachers have few opportunities to visit their own communities. This isolation affects morale and is a deterrent



to those considering entering the teaching profession.

Teaching resources, such as lesson planning books, curriculum guides and textbooks, are woefully inadequate or unavailable, especially to rural schools. Schools often have to rely on donor funding for teaching resources and texts. Come test time at Ilkurot Primary, there is no way to reproduce testing materials and often not enough paper.

These extremely poor working conditions affect the government's ability to recruit new teachers, at a time when more teachers are desperately needed. Tanzania's Primary Education Development Program (PEDP), established in 2002 and designed to ensure the enrolment of all children in primary school by 2006, was important for the country's development objectives. However, the rate of enrolment has far outstripped the number of teachers recruited, resulting in increasingly large and unmanageable class sizes.

The government has met this shortfall by providing those secondary school graduates who fail to qualify for higher education with just a few weeks training before placing them into classrooms. These teachers are ill-equipped to provide a quality education, and there are few resources available to upgrade or improve their skills while they are on the job. Very little in-service training is offered, and non-governmental organizations provide most of what can be found.

Those who do go on to receive a post-secondary education spend just one year



at teachers' college, not two, as was the norm a few years ago. During their second year, trainee teachers are posted in schools where they are, supposedly, supervised by tutors from their teachers' college. According to the Tanzania Teachers' Union, nearly two thirds of the country's teachers lack appropriate qualifications.

A progress review, conducted and published by the Government of Tanzania, indicated that in 2006, just 65.9 per cent of the target number of teachers and tutors had been recruited. The effect of this gap is compounded by the fact that out of the approximately 200,000 teachers in the country, more than 27,000 of them may die from HIV/AIDS by 2020.

All of these facts clearly point to incredibly dire working conditions for teachers. Low salaries and benefits and the removal of teachers from their communities have an obvious impact on a teacher's ability to provide for them-

selves and their families, and negatively impact their morale and any resolve to improve their teaching abilities. Allowing individuals to teach with minimal qualifications and little or no continuous training or resources leaves them vastly under-equipped to provide quality education. Teacher motivation is, without a doubt, a key element in achieving the high quality education necessary for Tanzania's development and the reduction of poverty.

Too few resources for the number of development goals undoubtedly account for some of Tanzania's difficulties in the education sector. However, an audit conducted by Deloitte & Touch from 2005 and 2006, and information from UNESCO, indicate that there is the potential that more than half of the funds earmarked for education will not, in fact, reach the intended beneficiaries.

It is critical that the government of Tanzania takes action to improve working conditions for teachers. The Tanzania Teachers' Union, which represents the majority of the country's teachers, faces the tough challenge of achieving higher standards for the country's educators. A strong collective voice is the only way that Tanzania's teachers will achieve the working conditions necessary for both teachers and students to survive and thrive. 🐦

Andrea Wobick is a lawyer with Green & Chercover and specializes in labour law, human rights issues and employment law. She recently spent six months in Tanzania working for the Tanzania Legal and Human Rights Centre.



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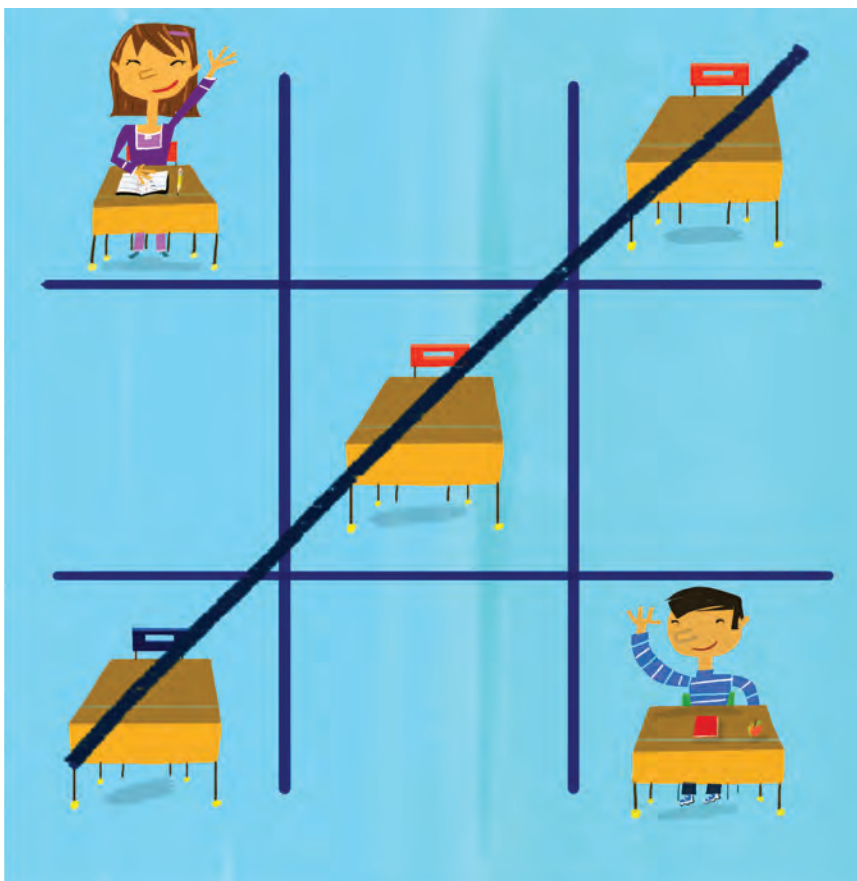
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Student absenteeism

Crunching the numbers



“IN the United States, some school boards have experienced situations where the number of students absent exceeded the number of those present.... If the situation is not to be replicated in this province, then some positive actions must be taken now to avoid or limit high incidences of absenteeism.”

The quotation comes from a 1979 Ministry of Education report, *Patterns of School Attendance in Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools*, the last major study of attendance undertaken in the province. Three decades later, the statement reads more like a prediction than a warning: the current rising rate of student absenteeism in Ontario's secondary schools, like so many other recent changes in provincial education,

replicates yet another failed American experience. The fallout from this disturbing trend extends not only to students, but also to frontline educators trying to cope with an increasingly dysfunctional situation.

The 1979 Ministry report, using attendance records from 16 representative secondary schools, put the daily level of student absenteeism at 8.9 per cent. The current figure is unknown. But a survey on educational issues conducted by OSSTF/FEESO District 13, Durham, in 2007, gives some indication of the extent of the problem. Of the nearly 1,000 teachers surveyed, 30 per cent cited attendance as their primary educational concern. Moreover, 62 per cent of respondents indicated having 20 per cent or more of their students absent on any

given day, more than double the provincial average of 1979. But are Durham's numbers typical for Ontario as a whole? Probably, if extensive anecdotal evidence is accepted.

In researching this article, I spoke with dozens of OSSTF/FEESO members from across the province. In every case, the response was the same. They told me that student absenteeism is unacceptably high, often 20 per cent or more, especially in senior college and open courses; that students know how to work the system to snag a credit with minimal attendance and effort; and that administrators are not doing enough to reduce rampant absenteeism.

Assuming then, that the provincial absentee rate has at least doubled since 1979, how do we account for it? Assuming also, that students are not getting sick twice as often as they used to, the only answer is truancy: simply put, students are skipping classes more—and getting away with it. (One Student Success teacher informed me that he now tracks down his absent charges at local malls.) We need to distinguish between students who are absent for valid reasons and the growing number who are not. This article is concerned with the latter.

It is self-evident that good attendance improves a student's ability to learn and that bad attendance impedes it; this is a primary reason why daily school attendance is compulsory. But the effects extend beyond the individual student. As collective absenteeism rises, school personnel must spend more of the school day dealing with attendance issues. The classroom teacher, in particular, pays a high price: time taken up tracking deviations, conferring with administrators, phoning parents, getting truant students caught up, preparing and marking make-up assignments, and so on. All this, of course, is time taken away from the

group most inconvenienced by high absenteeism: the students who regularly attend class.

Particular stress is placed on the two educational support groups most closely engaged with it: attendance counsellors and secretaries. One attendance counsellor with whom I spoke estimated that secondary school absenteeism in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) now stands at about 20 per cent, which is similar to the Durham figure. His caseload has increased from 100 students in 2006 to 240 in 2008, largely because of Bill 52 (An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning) and its provision for compulsory attendance until age 18. He estimated a manageable caseload to be about 60 students. Prior to the new law, his workload had already increased significantly in 2003 when, five years after the TDSB amalgamation, the number of secondary attendance counsellors was cut from 31 to eight. The member's final comment summed up the

whole problem: "Attendance issues are everybody's issues."


The brunt of the daily work processing absentees falls to the school attendance secretary. A secretary from Hamilton-Wentworth who felt frustrated and overwhelmed by the current situation told me of an excessive and increasing workload that she also linked to Bill 52 and the understaffing that has resulted from it. On a daily basis, she estimated that between 25 and 30 per cent of her school's 1,200 students are absent, many because of truancy, and she felt that this is a far larger number than she could process comfortably. In her view, it made little sense to require 16- and 17-year-olds to remain in school if there are insufficient programs and resources to support them. Here again is another argument for increasing the number of vocational, work and trade programs available for students not engaged by the traditional curriculum.

So what's to be done? Members I interviewed for this article felt that administrators weren't doing enough to reduce

absenteeism, a view echoed in the 1979 Ministry report: "Local school boards have generally not been active in the area of regulating student absenteeism." But, according to a 2004-05 Statistics Canada study, attendance is of concern to Ontario's principals, 35 per cent of whom identified it as "a serious problem." Perhaps they too are simply overwhelmed by the sheer number of students they must now track and discipline. If administrators need additional resources such as more attendance counsellors and secretaries, then they need to lobby the ministry and boards. Administrators cannot reduce high absenteeism simply by monitoring it. They have to confront it aggressively and constantly.

The certainty among frontline educators that there is a crisis in attendance calls for a new provincial report on the issue. To come up with effective long-term solutions, educators need to know the exact numbers involved as well as the current patterns and causes of absenteeism. Such a report might consider these recommendations:

- in each secondary school, establish an Attendance Department whose sole job is to track and reduce absenteeism, and which consists of an attendance counsellor and one or more attendance secretaries;
- set a minimum attendance requirement for all credits;
- allow teachers to factor attendance into their marks; and
- on all student reports and transcripts, include a percentage attendance mark for each class and semester to be used by prospective employers and post-secondary admission departments.

In February of this year, the Ministry of Education congratulated itself on having raised the provincial graduation rate to 75 per cent, up seven points from 2003-04 and just 10 points short of its 2010 goal of 85 per cent. How ironic then that, although more students are now graduating from secondary school, fewer seem to be actually attending it. 

Jon Cowans, a recently retired teacher from the Durham District School Board, is a frequent contributor to *Education Forum*.

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In My Opinion

By Adam Mercer

Education is like a tree of knowledge

But are we forgetting about its roots?



THE already overcrowded office I share with seven colleagues was recently overrun with the annual influx of teacher candidates. Student teachers are amazing in their enthusiasm for the profession and their never-ending optimism for the future of education. Of course, part of the reason so many of us like having teacher candidates around year after year is that some of their enthusiasm does rub off on those of us who are more experienced, and, dare I say, more cynical.

This last crop of teacher candidates shared some of their experiences at the faculty of education with their mentors. One experience involved a course entitled Holistic Marking. The most interest-

ing fact, to me, about this course was its opening activity, during which teacher candidates were to rise from their desks and pretend to be trees. That image has stayed with me and the inescapable conclusion I have come to is that the education system is indeed like the tree of knowledge, but in areas such as discipline, funding and policy emphasis, we have spent so much time focusing on the various branches that we have neglected the heart of the tree, its roots.

The first thing that struck me was the idea that the roots need to be taken care of in order for the system to flourish. The branches are what make the tree look nice, but the tree doesn't need all of them in order to live. It is a fact that it is possible to cut down almost 35 per cent of a liv-

ing tree and it will continue to survive. I believe that we have spent far too much time, energy and money on the branches—various aspects of this tree of education—and far too little time on the root system that is needed to sustain it.

Part of the job of educating the young is to teach them how to survive in civilized society. In order to make it in the “real world,” kids need to know how to act. We are now putting considerable emphasis on initiatives such as the prevention of cyber-bullying, a phenomenon that was unheard of as recently as during my school years. That is not to say these things have no value; quite the opposite. A focus on cyber-bullying is great, as long as we take care of other discipline issues that can arise on any given day in a school.

Focusing on cyber-bullying makes complete sense if you have a student body that is clean and sober in the classroom. Recent waffling on the issue of drug dogs in schools has made this harder to ensure. Making certain that students do not swear at teachers, do not vandalize the building, its property or, on occasion, one another, must also be addressed. As important as some of the branches of the tree are, if we lose sight of the roots and stop tending them, the tree will not be healthy.

Currently, in the area of curriculum, there is an awful lot of talk coming from the Ministry of Education and boards dealing with the creation of locally developed courses, specifically those that merge two disciplines. This, in itself, is not a bad idea and it might even help some kids flourish. This particular branch has much to offer, but it is an example of the problem. Another example is the seemingly endless pile of money being thrown at the Native Studies curriculum. Once again, this branch of study is certainly worthy and could be a great tool to encourage many to buy into the system.

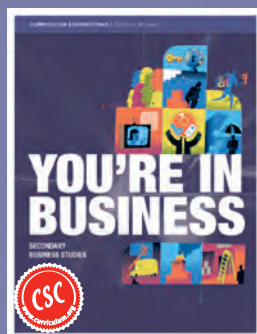
But again, the issue is those darned roots. A large numbers of textbooks are coming off the Trillium List for all of

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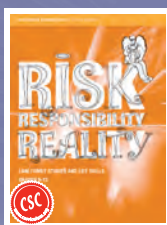
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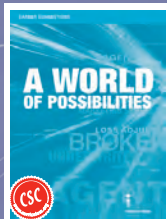
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those compulsory courses that were re-written under the last provincial administration. When that happened there was a huge influx of cash to pay for the textbooks needed for the new curriculum. Those textbooks are now being taken off the Trillium List; the Grade 9 texts were removed last year, the Grade 10 texts get the boot this year. Given that these are the two years that have the highest number of compulsory courses, you would think the focus would be on the roots, that is, on getting those texts replaced, rather than on courses that, while meaningful, are not necessary to graduate from high school in Ontario.

...we have spent
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tree, its roots

Policy emphasis has shifted over the last few years and this needs to be addressed for the same reason. Policy seems to emphasize that kids need to be in school, no matter what. It was recently pointed out to me that Canada has a higher graduation rate than any other industrialized country. Getting kids out of the system with a piece of paper is not the root, it is a branch, something that looks nice. It is great if they come out with the piece of paper, but it should represent a level of reading, writing and math ability that they are going to need to be successful. Unfortunately, policy has shifted to concentrate so much on the numbers of graduates that there is increasing pressure on teachers to move kids ahead at all grade levels (often referred to as “social promotion” in elementary schools). There are years when kids walk across /Continued on page 44

Letters

Thank you for all your comments

Student Failure: Another Side of the Story

Ben Levin misses the point entirely in his article "Student failure" (Winter 2008). The issue in "credit integrity" is not to meet a quota of F's, but rather how to deal with students who put little or no effort into a course. Instead of recognizing that credit integrity is intended to prevent students from getting around course requirements, Levin performs a conceptual sleight-of-hand that turns the issue back on classroom teachers, whom he insinuates do not provide "good instruction and strong support" for their students.

It doesn't take an advanced degree in education to know that if students are aware that there are no penalties for non-compliance, some will play the system. The emphasis here is on "some" students, for not all students respond the same way to instruction and support, no matter how good and strong. Levin commits the error of treating students as if they are all the same and can therefore all be reached in the same manner. We can certainly ensure that "virtually all students successfully complete high school" with enough credit recovery, but the question is, what kind of authentic education will these students receive unless standards are maintained?

When Levin's sleight-of-hand is recognized for what it is, the remainder of his article is exposed as no more than a series of empty platitudes dressed up as scientific evidence by his continual reference to "compelling evidence"—most of which is from uncited sources. Perhaps Levin can tell us what he does with his students who fail to attend his classes, complete assignments, or write exams? What sort of "good instruction and strong support" does he give them? Or is Levin someone with lots of advice but little direct experience?

James Côté
Professor, Department of Sociology
University of Western Ontario,
London, ON

Student Failure: Another Side of the Story

With all due respect, Ben Levin's analogy has one serious flaw in reasoning.

Successful hospitals don't have a 30 per cent re-infection rate. Why? Because they improved their methods through further studies and repeated practice.

Successful businesses don't have a 30 per cent defective rate. Why? Because they improved their methods through further studies and repeated practice.

Successful airlines don't have 30 per cent late arrivals and lost luggage rate.



Why? Because they improved their methods through further studies and repeated practice.

A pioneer of open-heart surgery, Dr. Dwight Harken, an American army surgeon, developed a technique that would allow him to cut into the wall of a still-beating heart to remove shrapnel. His first attempts, on animals, resulted in a 100 per cent failure rate. On his second attempt, half died and in his third attempt, 86 per cent survived. He felt confident enough to try the technique on humans. All of his human patients survived.

Failure has its reward—knowledge.

Steve Davis,
Barrie, ON

Piranhas in the think tanks

Thank you for the wonderful article, "Piranhas in the think tanks." However, suggesting that neoliberal thinkers are similar to piranhas is unfair to that noble predator. Rather, I believe a better metaphor would be to compare neoliberal thinkers to flesh eating bacteria—

mindless and single-purposed organisms that collectively unleash destruction on a well-organized, multicellular organism in their attempt to survive and reproduce.

Andrew Cumberland
Glebe Collegiate Institute, Ottawa, ON

Thanks for Mika

What a great article by Mika Damianos. Without humour, I don't think I could have survived my 36 years of teaching! Students seem to enjoy classes much more when they know that there will be some funny moments. I tried to use puns whenever possible and the worse the pun, the more the students seemed to enjoy it! Humour with my fellow teachers sure made the days more enjoyable and that's why I always thought lunch was one of the most important periods of the day. Over lunch you could share your problems, get good advice and often share a laugh that could brighten up any difficult day. Mika hit it right on the button when she described the challenges teachers face, how exhausting teaching can be, and how important humour is to both teachers and students.

Harry Huizer
St. Catharines, ON

Human Security: A Canadian concept worth protecting

On behalf of the Canadian Landmine Foundation (CLMF), I would like to commend you for your recent coverage of the anti-personnel landmine issue. Canadians of all ages should be proud of the work their government did to ban these weapons. The CLMF believes that the youth of our nation should learn about this issue as part of our national history. A variety of lesson plans, educational materials, activities and guest speakers are available through the CLMF. We can be reached at 416-365-9461 or on the web at www.clmf.org.

Scott Fairweather
President & CEO
Canadian Landmine Foundation

Sir, I Can Read Just Fine, But I Hate Books

Keeping up with electronic media

BY ROD HEIKKILA

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL

We don't have to look far to find cultural references and warnings about mirrors. Objects in the mirror truly are closer than they appear. Narcissus wasted away beholding his own beautiful image. There is the mirror that the ill-fated Macbeth must face in his encounter with witches. Harry Potter nearly wastes away before the Mirror of Erised, but ultimately triumphs over both the mirror and his rival. Snow White would have suffered less had her stepmother ignored the mirror on the wall; one recent updated comedy movie reincarnation, *Sydney White (and the Seven Dorks)*, must contend with a computer mirror that works a

lot like Facebook, the invention of 19-year-old genius and Harvard dropout, Mark Zuckerberg.

I began to reflect on mirrors and books after viewing a short video, posted on YouTube by a class of second-year Kansas State University students, titled *A Vision of Students Today*. It is very provocative and helps me begin to understand why they, and so many of my own students, resist books, sometimes almost violently. More students seem more aggressive now than just 20 years ago in their efforts to avoid reading—reading books, that is—even before they know what they're about. Many of us are falling all over ourselves to make reading rele-

vant and exciting, even to those with measurably high language acquisition skills, to use today's fashionable jargon. Many of us turn to everything from video to graphic novels. We try to grab and then to hold their attention, hopefully, and even desperately. One bright and academically successful student groaned, "Why read these old books? We never get to study stories with characters like us, characters that use computers." She is not alone. While authorities crow about the greater than ever need for literacy, even video is losing its classroom appeal—and I think Canada's own Marshall McLuhan might have predicted why our time seems so out of sync, espe-

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN WEBSTER/WWW.I2ART.COM



cially when it comes to reading books in the electronic age.

That little video from Kansas begins with a 30-year-old reference to Professor McLuhan: "Today's child is bewildered when he enters the 19th century environment that still characterizes the educational establishment where information is scarce but ordered and structured by fragments, classified patterns, subjects, and schedules." What follows is an all-too-common indictment of the current world of formal education and a tacit belief, that somehow, new electronic media will save them from the archaic structures in which they feel trapped. At least, I think that's what they're saying and that is where we disagree. I accept

cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.'...A photograph is, visually, 'high definition.' A cartoon is 'low definition' simply because very little information is provided."

The audience fills in the missing information. Furthermore, "[a]ny hot medium allows less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than dialogue." In fact, books are so hot that if you force a reader to employ more than one sense at a time, say by singing to her while spraying cologne and tugging gently at her hair, she will find the

While I am bewildered by the multi-sensory requirements of that media experience and am exhausted by the type of focus and attention required by it, there is something more at play than what is commonly called 'attention span.' They are, in all senses, cooler than I am.

HEAR YE, HEAR YE, BACK TO THE FUTURE

Most of us have heard about Marshall McLuhan's now famous coining of the phrase Global Village. He meant much more, however, than the obvious metaphor of the world being a smaller place owing to mass media and rapid transit. When that German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg, invented the printing press almost 600 years before McLuhan's first



Students are radically open to have something that's in sync with their experience of living in an electronic world

— Frank Zingrone

that they are more bewildered than ever, but they are probably wrong about what is at the heart of the situation and what to do about it.

My thoughts stem from ideas that appear in *Essential McLuhan*, a collection of the great thinker's sometimes cryptic, often paradoxical work, published by his son, Eric McLuhan and York University Professor Frank Zingrone, way back in 1995, long before YouTube and Facebook. As Zingrone then explained to the *Toronto Star*, "The students are radically open to having something that's in sync with their experience of living in an electronic world." That "something" is, in this case, a book—an irony and a paradox Marshall McLuhan would surely have fully appreciated.

MEDIA HOT AND COLD

To begin to understand how real books and Facebook differ, McLuhan's idea of hot and cold media is key. He wrote, "There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a

act of reading itself nearly impossible; the life of the story, detailed by the alphabet composed of ink on a paper page is snuffed out, for the moment at least. Therefore, the more senses employed by the audience to experience or use any medium, the cooler it is.

As Facebook and other increasingly participatory electronic media work, even when the alphabet (a fairly hot medium in itself) is used, books are essentially hot and the others are very cold and growing colder by the minute. My teenage daughters are typical of their generation. They can use Facebook while eating and drinking, talking to friends who are in the room, to another on the remote house telephone, and listening to music, while pushing the mouse around, tapping away at the keyboard, and receiving a text message on a vibrating cell phone. Other friends interrupt them regularly with interactive MSN pop-ups on screen. They seem to prefer to cool down the medium as much as possible and can carry on for hours.

teaching job, Western Civilization was essentially a cool culture, as most social organizations had always been. While some tribal societies never lost their coolness, there are living examples of highly interactive Mediaeval European village life. Older rituals still contained, for example, in a modern Catholic mass, have retained the multi-sensual participatory quality of Europe in the Middle Ages. Congregations act in unison, speak together, use music, ingest bread and wine, and smell incense. The "sign of peace" requires touching others with a handshake.

Increased literacy brought on by the printing press, McLuhan points out, had hot effects. Books and papers permeated society. The modern essay, for example, was born. A cool civilization began to heat up rapidly. He even attributes the fragmentary birth of the nation state and ethnic nationalism to the effects of mass produced written language used by readers who pondered lofty ideas in quiet solitude in media only other speakers

of that tongue could read and write in, almost exclusively.

THE SHOCKER: FROM GUTENBERG TO ZUCKERBERG

All that began to turn around with the invention of electronic mass media. The climactically hot society of the 19th century began to cool down and few but McLuhan seemed to notice. The electronic environment was everywhere, he pointed out, yet no one was examining the effects. He compared the situation to the idea that whoever discovered water was probably not a fish. Has Gutenberg's printed paper book led to Zuckerberg's online Facebook?

There are, of course, many consequences to cooling down or heating up people. They become bewildered. McLuhan argued that violence is another consequence of, for example, turning a tribal oral society into a hotter one by adding such media as alphabetized language and steel. The same is true, he said, when cooling down hot societies, like those in 19th century Western Europe—or born of it in, say, 1867. He also pointed out that hot societies, once cooled, will behave in village fashion, for better or worse. The cool environment of a Global Village, therefore, is as prone to helping out the neighbour, acting together and subordinating the individual's desires in favour of the general good, as it is prone to bowing before the conquering hero or rounding up witches to be burned. McLuhan observed that, “[f]or many people, this cooling system brings on a life-long state of psychic rigor mortis, or of somnambulism, particularly observable in periods of new technology.” We can be bewildered.

SO WHY DO MY WWW.STUDENTS RESIST BOOKS?

At the very least, if McLuhan is right, they're cool media users being forced to use a hot medium that can cause bewilderment and even violence. No wonder so many prefer to be read to, especially if we can discuss the book we're reading. Conversely, it also explains partly why so many tribal cultures of cool people take so readily to the Internet, much to the

surprise of many hotter people. In my experience, teens are generally, and often magnificently, a tribal lot.

But I also believe a student's negative reaction to books might have something to do with the mirror. McLuhan famously declared, “the medium is the message” but added that the audience is the content. Shakespeare's Hamlet speaks about the point of drama being to hold “a mirror up to nature,” yet in an unprece-

**Our challenge
is to enable all
generations to
explore the virtual
world of books
so they, like Alice,
will step through
the looking glass**



dented way, many cool media users, like my daughters, can see themselves almost directly in the new media. They exchange pictures and information primarily about themselves, publishing themselves on what is essentially a global scale and at a rate that Gutenberg could never have foreseen, but now it is done in an ever-cooler way. The names and terms seem to speak for themselves—MySpace, YouTube, iPod, TextMe. By now, most of us have googled ourselves, but to look at Facebook is barely to look at a book at all; it is a mirror.

Academics, people who believe in literature and the power that books of all sorts contain and bestow, might take solace,

however, in recalling that many people can and do still access real books. Harry Potter books are enormously popular for very good reason. How we teach students to read and to write books is, of course, a very large and worthwhile question for us in education, but I'd venture that the answer does not lie entirely in more electronics, rubrics or literacy tests. I remember the spirited arguments against calculators when they first came out. Many resisted the ballpoint pen because of what it would do to penmanship. Smart boards will soon go the way of the filmstrip projector and the ditto machine.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Perhaps our challenge is to enable all generations to explore the virtual world of books so they, like Alice, will step through the looking glass. I hold with that very cool band from Quebec, Harmonium, who cried out in the 1970s, “Pour un instant, j'ai oublié mon nom. Ça m'a permis enfin d'écrire cette chanson.... Pour un instant j'ai retourné mon miroir. Ça m'a permis enfin de mieux me voir.”

While the rhyming couplets of “name and song” and “mirror and see” are lost in translation, the song remains the same, “For an instant, I forgot my name. That allowed me, at last, to write this song.... For an instant, I reversed my mirror. That allowed me, at last, to see myself better.”

Our society continues to cool. Most students are bound to be cooler than most of their teachers. Maybe we can avoid the “psychic rigor mortis...observable in periods of new technology” that McLuhan warns us about. He shows how we can all be bewildered, but understanding the dynamics at play might be a first step in working out exactly how best to proceed in education, and elsewhere, as everyone faces the often frightening and exciting effects of the uses and abuses of rapidly evolving electronic media. Perhaps more than ever, we might still need a place for solitude and a good book. 🐦

Rod Heikkila teaches at Parkside CI in St. Thomas with the Thames Valley District School Board. He is also a long-time OSSTF/FEESO activist.



GRAPHIC NOVELS TO THE RESCUE

How illustrated heroes save reluctant readers

BY SOPHIE BOYER

ILLUSTRATION: ERIC KIM

I grew up in the 1980s, with Transformers, Spiderman, GI Joe and many other superheroes linked to the comic genre. It is no surprise, therefore, that graphic novels have found their way into my high school classroom. And luckily so. Regardless of students' reading level, they welcome this new venue for critical thinking with open minds; murmurs of excitement can be heard from even the most reluctant readers. Graphic novels focus primarily on visual literacy, which is a skill most students are well equipped to understand. Introducing graphic novels into the classroom can have a positive impact on both student motivation and success.

Children are bombarded with drawn images in many forms throughout the

day, from storybooks at bedtime to cartoon characters that control the morning airwaves. When I was young, Care Bears and Inspector Gadget ruled, now it's Dora the Explorer and SpongeBob SquarePants. Surprisingly, although these are slotted as "kids" shows, many high school students identify with the characters; their Dora backpacks are a testament to their desire to return to a childhood escape. Adults flock to theatres to see the latest installments of X-Men, Spiderman and Iron Man.

Why is it then that we leave these images behind when it comes to the study of stories in the language arts? Images that spoke to us in childhood and have thus become intrinsic to our under-

standing of conflict resolution, relationships, and morality have yet to find their place in our curriculum.

According to Katherine Bucher and M. Lee Manning in their book *Bringing Graphic Novels into a School's Curriculum*, we need to capitalize on this conditioning, especially when we consider that "[g]rowing up with television and video games, contemporary young adults look for print media that contain the same visual impact and pared-down writing style and contribute to their enthusiasm for visual rather than written literacy." This is not to say that graphic texts should replace traditional texts entirely, but rather that they have a unique place in encouraging literacy for both at-risk readers who need extra motivation, and for avid readers looking for a new challenge.

My curiosity for graphic novels was piqued while teaching a Grade 9 summer school class. I was faced with an enriched student who had behavioural issues. He took little interest in classroom activities; getting him to work was virtually impossible. But there were a few special days where he sat quietly—no disruptive activity and no angry outbursts—immersed in what he was reading. These were Manga texts, variations of the graphic novel. I was impressed. Here was a student who, though difficult to motivate to sit still and/or concentrate in most subject areas, was in fact an advanced reader and would sit quietly to read graphic texts. Further research revealed to me just how popular this genre was among teenagers.

"Popular" culture, with thanks to Jeff Smith

My first opportunity to study graphic novels presented itself when I was teaching Grade 9 applied English. We had an ever-changing media unit; a chameleon that was at times too bold, at times too flat. What better place to introduce a graphic novel than in a media unit! The teacher could scaffold how to decipher meaning through images, and students could apply their knowledge not only to a magazine ad, but also to a proper story that contained all the elements of plot.

It was difficult to find the right text to study—many graphic novels do not have

a PG-rating, many would not receive a "stamp of approval" for the classroom. Luckily, I was introduced to Jeff Smith's *Bone: Out from Boneville*, the archetypal quest of a young "bone" who must find his way home after his greedy cousin topples them into exile. It is a light-hearted adventure story in which characters survive typically human themes: love, hate, greed, power, right vs. wrong. The quirky, funny characters elicit laughter from students and teachers. This is



Jeff Smith's *Bone: Out from Boneville*, with its quirky, funny characters, elicits laughter from students and teachers

exactly the kind of atmosphere where reluctant readers might feel more comfortable participating in class discussions and activities.

I like to start both graphic and traditional novel units with an age-old, pre-reading activity: I ask students to guess the story's content based on the front cover. They chart their responses to both the text and images, providing links to plot, theme, character and conflict.

In my applied class, using *Bone* helped build students' confidence in their ability to understand images; they were very good at it, and thus began the unit with a

sense of their own knowledge and possibilities for success. They had fun, which to me is one of the most important tenets of teaching the graphic novel: it's fun for everyone involved.

Students enjoyed filling in blank speech bubbles and practising their own creative flair for storytelling. They found this activity manageable because the images guided them. The images were also imperative to their overall understanding of the plotline and characters: "students are encouraged to read the story instead of being intimidated by the volume of text and unfamiliar words," write David Booth and Kathleen Lundy in *In Graphic Detail: Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom*. Students read body language, settings, and the use of contrast and colour to uncover meaning in the story. They laughed over Fone Bone's crush on Thorn, which is shown by his blushing cheeks, and hearts strewn all over the page; they understood that when a character speaks in all caps they are shouting or angry about something; when the female rat pouts with her arms crossed over being called "fat," they witnessed the finer points of a typical relationship. Using these visual clues, students quickly asserted their understanding of the text and were more willing to participate.

Furthermore, the students could easily make associations between *Bone* and their experiences as consumers of mass media. As Bruce Pirie states in his book *Reshaping High School English*, "We bring to each reading our experience of other literature, as well as memories of anecdotes, advertisements, film, and television." Due to its archetypal nature, *Bone* not only reflects the literary canon, but also popular culture. Students recognized connections to characters and scenarios from movies such as *Troy*, *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and the Harry Potter series. For example, the Red Dragon—mysterious, fearsome and ever-present—is akin to sages such as Yoda and Gandalf; The Hooded One, master of the evil rat creatures, reminded students of "The one who cannot be named" of the Harry Potter series, or even Darth Vader. They readily made

connections between graphic novels and their personal experiences.

Educational workers know that students can be hard to please. Students complain about not having fun and they crave excitement. At times teachers can feel like dancing bears that are expected to put on a show. When teaching the *Bone* unit, however, I never felt this way. Getting students to read out loud in an applied class? Easy. Asking them to perform a scene in front of their peers? No problem. Students came to class early, asking, "Are we reading *Bone* today?" The graphic novel lends itself so easily to student participation; it motivates them to be a part of the classroom environment where they have often felt disconnected.

Not only did the students feel empowered in the classroom, they also demonstrated improved results. Their understanding of the text was apparent in higher quiz results, while their connection to the text appeared in their efforts on the summative task. Another advantage to choosing *Bone* is that it is a series. The students were curious to find out what happened in the next volume, and shared it around the classroom. What a promising thought for students who rarely use the library for pleasure reading.

The experiment continues with pride

Spurred on by the success my applied students enjoyed, I wanted to test the versatility of the graphic novel in my Grade 10 academic classroom. I set out to find a complex story, complete with literary devices and important issues, to satisfy the critical thinking expectations of the course. With these parameters in mind, I was quickly won over by *Pride of Baghdad*, by Brian K. Vaughan and illustrated by Niko Henrichon. A true story about freedom and survival set against the background of the US invasion of Iraq, this narrative is told through the eyes of four lions that escape from the Baghdad Zoo, only to discover their insignificant status when faced with American soldiers.

During the breakdown of the front cover of the text, students immediately came up with in-depth analyses of the words and images, and deconstructed ideas like captivity and freedom. *Pride of*

Baghdad is appealing on many levels; it's a story about lions that escape from a zoo, but it delves much deeper into themes of power, exploitation and the destruction of innocent lives. This allows for a level of critical analysis where students come face-to-face with metaphors, symbols and images that force them to genuinely think about where they stand on global issues. Images are powerful—you have no choice but to see what's in front of you. This is why many authors

Bone and Pride of Baghdad pull us into a world where we become absorbed in the characters' lives



choose the graphic genre to explore difficult issues like war and genocide, says Rocco Versaci in his book *This Book Contains Graphic Language*.

An overwhelming majority of students applauded the visual appeal of the unit and welcomed the opportunity to study literature in a "new venue." They especially liked the creative extensions, which included drawing missing panels, coming up with a prologue and writing a letter to the author or illustrator inviting them to the school for a workshop. Many students, including my most disenchanted, improved their results during the

unit, and 96.5 per cent of the class said they would study a graphic novel again. When asked if they would like to take an elective on graphic novels, almost 60 per cent responded "yes." One observant student said, "I would take the course because graphic novels have a lot of symbolism tied into the real world."

So what next?

Bone and *Pride of Baghdad* accomplish what all good stories accomplish. They pull us into an unknown, yet familiar world, where we become absorbed in the characters' lives. Well-written graphic novels are "a mindful form of escapism that uses a unique kind of language—'graphic language'—to invite us into different worlds in order to help us better understand our own," writes Versaci. Images add a new dimension to meaning making and help develop critical thinking skills; essential to good teaching practice in the language arts.

In junior high school classes, most graphic novels can be studied in two to three weeks, providing a different venue to study course themes and elements of plot. In senior classes, the range of texts is wider, and allow for more complex, mature themes. The graphic novel also lends itself well to independent study units, especially in applied and college level courses. Teachers of history and modern languages will find that graphic novels can enrich their curriculum.

In our work to break down the barriers to student success, graphic novels are a viable, creative option to add to our toolkits. They capitalize on our students' natural affinity for images and on their knowledge of the various media forms in their daily lives. The graphic novel inspires creativity. Students feel connected to the genre for its entertainment value and popularity, and find comfort and success in the classroom. Graphic novels have a universal value for all students, not just those at risk, and have an important place in the English classroom. 🐾

Sophie Boyer teaches at Sandalwood Heights Secondary School with the Peel District School Board.

FROM ME TO WE

Children helping children through education

By Wendy Anes Hirschegger

The anticipation in the air was palpable as the time of the keynote speaker's appearance drew closer. Craig Kielburger, who at 12 years old in 1995 drew the world's attention to the plight of child labourers, was slated to speak to the delegates, alternates, guests and visitors at the 2008 OSSTF/FEESO Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly (AMPA). Craig's organization, Free The Children, had a booth in the foyer outside of the assembly hall and it was doing brisk business.

At 11:15 a.m., President Ken Coran came to the microphone and announced that Craig was snowed in, in Vancouver, and was unable to get a flight out. Murmurs of disappointment swept through the audience, but Coran quickly reassured them that Craig had arranged for a pinch hitter—his brother Marc Kielburger.

Having heard both Craig and Marc on previous occasions, I knew that we would not be disappointed by the last minute change in speakers. We were at times moved to laughter, and at others, to tears as Marc spoke passionately about how, as a teenager, he came to be an activist, and how that has continued into his adult life. But perhaps /Continued on page 26

PHOTO COURTESY OF FREE THE CHILDREN



Craig and Marc Kielburger visit with children in Kenya



DU MOI AU NOUS

Les enfants en aident d'autres grâce à l'éducation

Par Wendy Anes Hirschegger



L'attente était palpable à l'approche de l'heure prévue pour le conférencier principal. Craig Kielburger qui, âgé de 12 ans en 1999, avait attiré l'attention mondiale sur la situation de la main-d'œuvre enfantine, devait s'adresser aux délégués, aux substituts, aux invités et aux visiteurs à la Réunion annuelle de l'Assemblée provinciale (RAAP 2008 d'OSSTF/FEESO). Enfants Entraide (*Free the Children*), organisme créé par Craig, avait un kiosque dans le hall de l'assemblée et ses affaires marchaient bien.

À 11 h 15, Ken Coran, président, s'est rendu au microphone et a annoncé que Craig était bloqué par la neige à Vancouver et que les vols ne décollaient pas. Des murmures de déception se sont emparés de l'assistance, mais Ken les a rapidement rassurés que Craig avait pris des arrangements pour un remplaçant, son frère Marc Kielburger.

Pour avoir entendu Craig et Marc dans le passé, je savais que nous ne serions pas déçus par le changement de conférencier à la dernière minute. Nous sommes passés du rire aux larmes alors que Marc nous parlait avec passion de son implication /Suite à la page 27



Education is the
key to everything,
but you can't
educate children
if they have
no building



Marc Kielburger, chief executive director of Free The Children, spoke to OSSTF/FEESO delegates at its annual meeting in March 2008

Continued from page 24/ the most moving part of the address came when Marc turned the microphone over to Michel Chikwanine, who had been stolen from his family in the Congo, forced to witness atrocities too horrible for us to imagine and as a child soldier, to kill on numerous occasions before he escaped and was rescued.

It was impossible to hear these stories and not be inspired to take up the Kielburgers' challenge to help. And indeed, the next morning, delegate Craig Read went to the microphone:

"Speaker, I rise this morning on a point of personal privilege to speak to the House as a follow-up to the 'Me to We' address yesterday by Marc Kielburger and Michel. Seldom in my life have I been moved as much as I was listening to those gentlemen, and I am sure many of you feel as I do. Year after year this House responds to various needs presented and I am here today to ask you to respond to the unprecedented needs presented to us by Marc and Michel. District 11, Thames Valley and others we have spoken with would like to respond in a tangible way to Marc's plea. He mentioned that the cost of building a whole school is only \$8,500. He also mentioned that 'Education is the key to everything,' but you can't educate children if they have no building. We in District 11 challenge you as individuals, districts and bargaining units to write a cheque or donate cash for this worthy cause. My question to the House, paraphrasing Marc's presentation, is 'What will be our legacy from AMPA 2008?'"

Ken Coran then responded by saying that not only would the "hat be passed," but that the provincial executive would pledge to match whatever was raised in the House that day. Later in the afternoon, Coran announced, that together with the matching donation from the provincial office, over \$18,000 had been raised or pledged—enough to build at least two schools.

Throughout the day, delegates picked up information to take back to their own schools and districts to inspire others to take up, or to continue the challenge.

One district already heavily involved with Free The Children, and other social justice initiatives, is in fact District 11, Thames Valley. In November 2004, Bryan Smith, then the Chair of the district's Human Rights Committee, working together with personnel from the board office and Nelson Publishing, arranged for Marc Kielburger to speak to the students of College Avenue Secondary School in Woodstock, and then at a public event at the board office at which the principal, a number of teachers and students from Kensal Park French Immersion Public School presented Marc with a cheque for funds they had raised to build a school in a needy part of the world.

In addition, the District 11 Human Rights Committee purchased a copy of the book *Take Action!: A Guide to Active Citizenship* by Marc and Craig Kielburger for every secondary school in the district, to encourage social activism at each school.

Since that time, more and more schools in Thames Valley have taken up the challenge. And more recently, OSSTF/FEESO member Dorian Rosati, who heads the board's Social Justice Task Force, has provided three in-service opportunities for schools to send teams of students, /*Continued on page 28*

Suite de la page 25/ en tant qu'activiste à l'adolescence et comment cela s'est traduit dans sa vie d'adulte. Mais la partie la plus émouvante de son discours a été lorsque Marc a donné le microphone à Michel Chikwanine, qui a été enlevé à sa famille au Congo, a été obligé d'être témoin d'atrocités trop horribles à imaginer et de tuer à maintes occasions alors qu'il était enfant-soldat, avant de s'enfuir et d'être secouru.

Il était impossible d'écouter leurs histoires sans être incité à relever le défi de Marc Kielburger et d'aider. Et le lendemain matin, Craig Read, un délégué, s'est rendu au microphone :

« Monsieur le président, je soulève ce matin une question personnelle de privilège afin de m'adresser à l'Assemblée à la suite du discours de Marc Kielburger et de Michel sous le thème « Du moi au nous » qui a eu lieu hier. Dans ma vie, j'ai rarement été touché comme je l'ai été en écoutant ces messieurs et je suis certain que vous ressentez les mêmes sentiments que moi. Au fil des années, cette Assemblée a réagi à divers besoins exprimés et je suis ici aujourd'hui pour vous demander de réagir aux besoins sans précédent que nous ont présentés Marc et Michel. Le district 11, Thames Valley et d'autres avec qui nous avons discuté, aimerait répondre de manière concrète à l'appel de Marc. Il a mentionné que le coût de construction d'une école est de seulement 8 500 \$. Il a aussi indiqué que « l'éducation est la clé de tout », mais vous ne pouvez pas éduquer les élèves s'il n'y a pas d'édifice. Nous, du district 11, vous lançons le défi en tant qu'unité de négociation, district ou personne de faire un chèque ou de donner de l'argent à cette cause louable. En paraphrasant la présentation de Marc, ma question à l'Assemblée est « Quel sera l'héritage de la RAAP? »

Ken Coran a ensuite réagi en disant que non seulement nous ferions une quête, mais que l'Exécutif provincial s'engageait à égaler le montant recueilli aujourd'hui par l'Assemblée. Plus tard en après-midi, il a annoncé qu'ensemble, avec le don du Bureau provincial, nous avions des engagements ou recueilli plus de 18 000 \$, suffisamment pour construire au moins deux écoles.

Tout au long de la journée, les délégués ont ramassé des renseignements pour ramener dans leurs écoles et districts afin d'encourager d'autres personnes à poursuivre le défi.

Le district 11, Thames Valley, est très impliqué avec *Free The Children* et d'autres initiatives en matière de justice sociale. En novembre 2004, Bryan Smith, alors président du comité des droits de la personne du district, en collaboration avec le personnel du siège social et *Nelson Publishing*, a pris les dispositions pour que Marc Kielburger s'adresse aux



Michel Chikwanine a raconté aux délégués à la réunion annuelle d'OSSTF/FEESO comment il a été obligé de devenir enfant-soldat au Congo

élèves de l'école secondaire College Avenue de Woodstock. Il a aussi organisé un événement public au siège social du conseil lors duquel la direction de l'école, quelques enseignants et élèves de l'école publique d'immersion française Kensal Park ont remis à Marc un chèque représentant les fonds qu'ils avaient recueillis pour construire une école dans une région pauvre du monde.

De plus, le comité des droits de la personne du district 11 a acheté une copie du livre de Marc et Craig Kielburger intitulé *Take Action!: A Guide to Active Citizenship* pour toutes les écoles secondaires du district dans le but d'encourager l'activisme social dans chaque école.

Depuis ce temps, de plus en plus d'écoles de Thames Valley ont relevé le défi. Et tout récemment, Dorian Rosati, membre d'OSSTF/FEESO, qui préside le *Social Justice Task Force* (groupe de travail sur la justice sociale) a offert trois occasions à d'autres écoles d'envoyer des équipes d'élèves et un conseiller en personnel afin d'en apprendre davantage sur divers grands enjeux locaux et mondiaux en utilisant la philosophie « Du moi au nous » comme cadre pour aider les écoles à élaborer des plans de défense des dossiers relatifs à la justice sociale. À ce jour, plus de la moitié des écoles secondaires et des écoles élémentaires ont élaboré de tels plans.

Je ne serais pas surprise d'apprendre /Suite à la page 28

Continued from page 26/ with a staff advisor, to learn about a variety of global and local issues of concern, with the Kielburgers' "Me to We" philosophy as a framework to help schools develop plans to take action on social justice issues. To date, over half of the secondary schools and over half of the elementary schools have developed such plans.

I would not be at all surprised if I were to learn that this kind of enthusiasm for the Free The Children initiatives and other social justice issues exists in most, if not all, of our districts. Certainly, students at any age respond with genuine caring when they learn of the plight of children elsewhere in our province, and the world, and they are presented with practical ideas for taking action. And thanks to Marc Kielburger and Michel Chikwanine, there are more than 700 potential OSSTF/FEESO activists among us.

For more information about Craig and Marc Kielburger's organizations go to:

- www.freethechildren.com
- www.leaderstoday.com
- www.metowe.org
- www.metowestyle.com

Ensemble, avec le don équivalent du Bureau provincial, les délégués d'OSSTF/FEESO ont recueilli ou promis plus de 18 000 \$ à Enfants Entraide (*Free The Children*), suffisamment pour contruire au moins deux écoles

Suite de la page 27/ que ce genre d'enthousiasme pour les initiatives d'Enfants Entraide et les autres dossiers en matière de justice sociale existe dans la plupart si non tous nos districts. Bien sûr les élèves de tout âge réagissent avec une réelle compassion lorsqu'ils apprennent la situation désespérée de d'autres enfants ailleurs dans la province et dans le monde. Ils présentent des idées pratiques pour intervenir. Et grâce à Marc Kielburger et à Michel Chikwanine, il y a parmi nous plus de 700 activistes d'OSSTF/FEESO possibles.

Pour de plus amples renseignements sur les organisations de Craig et de Marc Kielburger, visitez www.enfantsentraide.org, www.freethechildren.com, www.leaderstoday.com, www.metowe.org et www.metowestyle.com.



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Stills By Timothy King

Roots run deep

Tim King, a teacher at Centre Wellington District High School in Fergus, reluctantly travelled to England recently. This was his first visit back to his homeland since immigrating to Canada in 1977. Tim's grandmother had passed away, and it was time.

"For years, I talked myself out of returning, thinking that it would be strange and believing that things like nationality, family or place don't matter, but I found out they do," said King. "It was a strange feeling going home after 30 years and realizing that it is home. On top of all that, the place itself talked to me: everywhere I walked, I felt connections. Standing in front of the house where I lived before we left created a sudden tangle of memories. The roots run deep."

King took his camera on the trip and made good use of it. The Ferris wheel, known as the London Eye, has become a modern icon of Britain. The closeup of the fish sculpture was taken in front of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in London. The beach is in King's hometown, Sheringham in North Norfolk. The flowering bush (which was blossoming in February), was taken in King's late grandmother's back garden.





©s

E Q A O

AND THE MISMEASURE OF SCHOOLS

Testing at what cost
and to what end?

BY JIM NEILL

Debate continues to rage about the value of province-wide testing in public education. One article will never settle the question of “to test or not to test.” Instead, since there are three important and basic evaluation attributes for tests; validity, reliability and utility, I will consider the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing in Ontario schools in terms of those attributes to try to address the question, “Testing for what purpose, at what cost, and to what end?”

Construct validity seeks to confirm that the test logically, empirically, and

accurately measures what is being evaluated. EQAO testing is used to measure an individual student’s literacy or numeracy skills. In isolation, this may be a valid test for a valid purpose. However, the Ministry of Education makes school scores publicly available, and they are widely reported in the media. Organizations such as the Fraser Institute and C.D. Howe, purporting to evaluate the performances of schools and boards of education, use the results to rank order schools. As a result, test validity and reliability are jeopardized by the sense of competition and the pressures to succeed that result from these rankings and

ILLUSTRATION: SOPHIE CASSON

the consequent test practices.

The first rule used to be, "Never teach to the test." Tests should be an accurate sample of a set of skills. The skills should be taught, not the test. However, the EQAO tests have taken on such perverse status that schools that have core text shortages, where students or classes must share textbooks, spend already scant resources on drill workbooks which replicate the test. School libraries, which research has shown are a key to literacy, are understaffed and under-resourced. Class time is borrowed from Grade 9 and 10 courses to teach specific test writing skills. Curriculum is modified in order to more directly teach the specific types of questions found on the test. Even EQAO endorses and encourages this practice by putting two practice versions of the test online with sample questions from previous tests. Scores have steadily improved. But at least some of the improved scores may be an artifact of students now being taught more explicitly how to write the test.

By the same token, when the EQAO scores are made public, it has become a colossal "What did you get?" game for schools and administrators. Principals are seldom judged directly, however, the way in which parents judge schools reflects on them. How the community values the school similarly reflects on them. The kind of positive learning environment which is fostered and perceived is important. But no other single measure, with the possible exception of graduation rates, reflects so heavily upon administrators and schools as EQAO test scores and so the pressures on administrators to ensure their schools do well on these measures will continue.

The result in many schools is that the test takes on an enormous, looming presence. Too often the test score takes on such an overwhelming importance that within the rules, potential success is maximized. There are more scribes, CD readings and computer written tests each year. To qualify for such test modification, students must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and so more students are having an IEP completed in

Grades 9 and 10. Acknowledging differentiated learners and therefore encouraging differentiated instruction and testing is a positive thing. Many schools have 25 per cent or more modified EQAO tests written. Again, this improved and more individualized test administration may account in some part for the recent provincial improvements in test scores.

Some schools have made the test a monumental event. In order to have sufficient scribes and test administrators, other classes are cancelled. Senior students are given supervised or unsupervised independent study, educational films are viewed and physical education activities are done. One thing that meas-



urement and evaluation experts agree upon is that tests should be as unobtrusive as possible. The emphasis we put on the test, the way it dictates the school day, and the way we administer it, may well increase the degree of student pressure and add to the obtrusive nature already too inherent in these tests. The days of the test in many schools are definitely like no other on the school calendar.

The consequence of pressures to do well on the test has led to several unfortunate true and troubling anecdotes. One school that succeeded in raising scores dramatically was looked at more closely in order to identify best practices. It turned out that a superintendent, a principal, a vice principal, and a teacher had not followed instructions and had improved test results after the fact. All were punished with College of Teachers suspensions and two retired as a result of those suspensions. There is no justification for such behaviour, but it is testimo-

ny to the pressures that many administrators and educators feel to improve test scores and therefore enhance their school's public ranking.

At another school, a student died tragically and suddenly just days before the test. The principal, expressing compassion, allowed students who were traumatized and grieving to choose a deferral. However, students who do not complete the test with their cohort are deemed to have failed, and that resulted in the school being identified as one of the poorest in the region by a local newspaper, and one of the poorest in the province by the foundation that does such extrapolated rankings. No caring educator would have made such a public pronouncement. The public release of school scores by the ministry and the subsequent ranking of schools allows such a cold calculation.

All tests have a standard error of measurement. Basically this means that the test score is not a hard or exact number. So, a standard error of ± 3 means a score of 77 actually represents more accurately a score of 74 to 80. To draw conclusions and make rankings from scores within this range, or marks that have improved or fallen within this range from one test year to the next, is statistically invalid. With published rankings however, such judgments are being made routinely on minor variances.

Statistical reliability is also effected by the size of the school. A smaller Grade 10 or Grade 9 cohort will have less reliable statistical data than a larger cohort since it might have, from year to year, wider variances in EQAO scores than a larger school. Again, this may mean scores improve or decline as a statistical variance rather than as a measure of achievement. Yet the public rankings continue.

In his book, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Stephen J. Gould humourously coined the phrase "physics envy" to describe practitioners of "soft" sciences who long for hard data to prove or disprove theories. Physics envy leads people to put far too much emphasis on numerical data, even when the numbers are not hard or

exact. Clearly a test score of 75 does not represent the same accuracy as a measurement of .75 milligrams. Educational psychometric scores are not exact measures, but rather educated approximations. To treat them otherwise, in the absence of any other supporting measures or observations is a mug's game. Yet that is how our schools are being judged.

Could also argued that intelligence is a theoretical construct and that to take such a construct and then to treat it as an exact reality is reification. Literacy and numeracy are exactly such abstract constructs, and so shouldn't be given the same concrete value as a chemical compound. Personally, I celebrate the fact that plumbers, mechanics, and electricians can read specs and manuals that would make me appear illiterate. Some of them, however, might well fail to get the required mark of 70 to pass this year's EQAO literacy test.

One handy guide to reliability is known as "Lyman's Five Dimensions of Reliability." These dimensions are interesting when applied to EQAO testing.

The first is "examinee incurred" and includes student motivation, stress, mental alertness, ability to follow instructions, stamina, work habits, etc. It's worth noting that most students have never written a three hour test prior to EQAO. They also may be doing so in an institutional atmosphere that may seem obsessed with the test.

The second dimension Lyman calls, "examiner/scorer influence." This influence is minimized when the test is purely a paper and pencil task. When scribes and additional time are allowed, the potential for examiner error is introduced and reliability is diminished. EQAO strictly prescribes that scribes need to be exact, but they do allow the suggestion of reviewing the response. However unintended or well intentioned, scribe cuing may introduce error.

"Test content" is another dimension and is simply the items chosen. These are tested by EQAO to make sure they are adequately discriminating. Indeed, each EQAO test includes items that are being field tested, which students complete. This is done for item analysis but not for stu-



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dent evaluation. This accounts for at least a portion of the three hours of the test.

The fourth dimension is “time influence.” This recognizes that improvements happen over time. So the second writing of the test the following year, as is the case in EQAO literacy, will clearly effect the results, usually positively.

“Situation induced” is the final dimension of reliability identified by Lyman. This has a stronger influence on less experienced or less motivated examinees. Environmental distractions such as storms, flickering lights, noise, etc. influence reliability. Again it’s worth noting that EQAO test takers indeed are inexperienced and the daily routine of their school may well be drastically altered on test day.

The original question was “Testing for what purpose, at what cost, and to what end?”


Individual EQAO scores are not shared in a timely way with educators. The test is primarily used to identify the student. The information shared is only remotely diagnostic. In other words, the information that is shared comes months

after the test and gives little insight into the specific skills that are deficient. So it names the unsuccessful student, but fails to give informed insight into instruction. There are far better diagnostic math, reading and writing tests that could help educators plan instruction. Such testing for teaching would be far more beneficial. EQAO fails as a test for teaching.

The provincial cost of EQAO testing is substantial, however, there are also hidden costs to schools. Human resources are expended in test preparation and administration. School curriculum is adjusted. Class time is spent in test preparation. Resources specific to testing are purchased. Yet, apart from naming students who fail, there is arguably little positive information that helps teachers improve instruction.

The most damning question, however, is “to what end.” Despite the questionable validity of EQAO in rating or ranking schools, this is unfortunately for what the test is best known. The unfortunate outcome of such public rankings is the “naming and shaming” of schools. Even CBC News, a trusted and reputable news

source, announced the newest Howe Institute rankings in a ten second sound bite that merely named the two lowest ranked schools provincially, with no context or critical analysis. This will be replicated across the province when local news outlets name schools each time the EQAO, Howe or Fraser Institute release their reports.

Clearly, we need to have an open and frank discussion of the merits of provincial testing in public education. Let’s ensure that any test is a valid and reliable measure of a student’s skills. These scores, however, have no place in the public ranking of schools. Tests should never be used to make extrapolated and statistically invalid claims. Doing so may benefit the agenda of the Howe or Fraser Institute (both of which favour public support of private education), however, it does little to improve student performance or to enhance public education. 

Jim Neill, a teacher librarian from OSSTF/FEESO District 26, Upper Canada, is a member of OSSTF/FEESO’s provincial Communications Political Action Committee.



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Edited by Marianne Clayton

Forum Picks

TORONTO'S BEST KEPT SECRET

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PHOTOS: THIS PAGE, SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; OPPOSITE PAGE, CENTRE, RUBY DAY; RIGHT, THE NECROPOLIS



OUTINGS



The Royal Ontario Museum is, without question, one of Toronto's most popular tourist destinations and a rich resource for local educators.

The opening of the ROM's Michael Lee-Chin Crystal and a preview of upcoming exhibitions were featured in *Education Forum* (Winter 2008) and it was during the research for that article, that we discovered a wealth of lesser-known ROM jewels, the travel, daytrips and walking tours offered under the Department of Museum Volunteers.

ROMtravel offers well-researched tours that examine world cultures and natural history. A ROM expert accompanies the tours and provides expert resources. One example, Crete, Santorini and Athens: The Minoan Legacy is offered September 23 and October 7, 2008. Take in 4,000 years of history layered in palaces, monasteries and Venetian ports. At the same time you can discover the spirit of present-day Greece, its people, arts and cuisine.

Spectacular day trips are offered through ROMbus. A tour of Niagara-on-the-Lake includes a ticket to Leonard Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* at the Shaw Festival Theatre, a backstage pre-show talk with cast members and lunch at the Charles Inn.

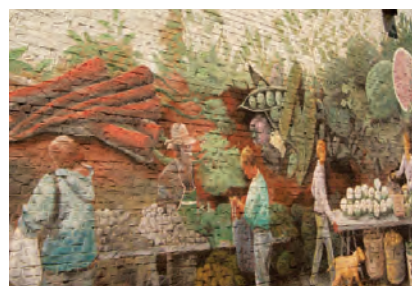
ROMwalk is a unique program that has been offered since 1980. ROMwalks are free, guided walking tours through distinctive Toronto neighbourhoods. Most Wednesdays at 6 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m., from May to October, ROM volunteers guide tours to significant historic and architectural sites. Tours take 1½ to 2 hours to complete, with 14 different walks available each season.

Along the Front is one of these walks. It features the St. Lawrence Market, old warehouses, the Flatiron

Building, Berczy Park, BCE Place, the Dominion Public Building, the Royal Bank Plaza, the Royal York Hotel and Union Station.



The St. Lawrence Market is well known for fresh meat, vegetables, fish and cheese. The Market Gallery of the City of Toronto's Culture Division and retail stores. At its opening in 1845, and through to 1899, it housed Toronto's City Hall, municipal offices, the police station and jail, and a market. By 1850, however, just five years after its opening, city engineers submitted reports that the shops were too small and that flooding in the basement kept prisoners knee-deep in water. Efforts to control the flooding were unsuccessful and the jail was relocated elsewhere in the city.



Opposite page (clockwise from top right): the Royal York Hotel, The Hockey Hall of Fame and the Flatiron Building. Top: The St. Lawrence Market. Above: Mural on the wall of the North Market. Above right: The entrance gate to the Necropolis.

The Necropolis Walk is another example of the variety of ROMwalks to choose from. Yes, it's a tour of a cemetery, but it is a cemetery that is one of Toronto's oldest, most beautiful and certainly historic. It was established in 1850 and is the site of some of Toronto's finest examples of Victorian Gothic architecture, including the cemetery entrance, the superintendent's lodge and the chapel. The Necropolis is also the final resting place of William Lyon Mackenzie, Toronto's first mayor; George Brown, founder of the *Globe and Mail*; and Thornton Blackburn, an escaped slave from Kentucky who found his way to Toronto and eventually started the city's first horse-drawn taxi cab service.

In addition to these free walks, two variations are available at \$10 per per-



son. ROMwalks Plus features Rosedale—Part Two. Rosedale was one of Toronto's earliest suburbs, named for the abundance of wild roses growing on the area's hillsides and developed for the city's wealthy and influential citizens. The area was just part of the estate of Sheriff William Jarvis and his wife Mary. The Jarvis family sold the Rosedale homestead in 1864 and residential development started shortly after. The \$10 per person fee includes refreshments, with reservations and advance payment required.

Private walks for groups such as clubs, community groups or families are available year round by special request. The cost is \$10 per person, with a minimum of ten participants.

For a list of all walks, schedules and starting points visit the ROM website at www.rom.on.ca/programs/rom_travel/index.php or call 416-586-5797.



BOOKS



**ME TO WE:
Finding Meaning in a Material World
by Craig Kielburger and
Marc Kielburger**

Published by John Wiley & Sons,
Canada, 2007
320 pages, \$16.95
Reviewed by Sharon McQueen

**Powerful Inspiration for
You and Your Classroom**

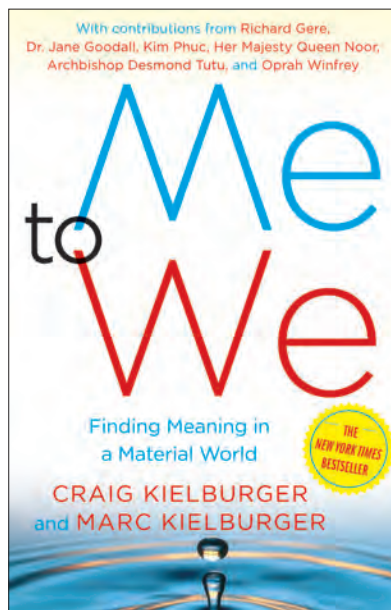
AS teachers and educational workers, we're in a powerful place to live the "Me to We" philosophy, which is to improve our lives and our world by reaching out to others. When there is less emphasis on "me" and more on "we" in our communities, our nation and our world, great things can happen.

This message of strengthening the communities around us is the theme of the *New York Times* bestseller, *Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World*, co-authored by Craig and Marc Kielburger of Free The Children. When you sit down to read this compilation of original stories, action-oriented tips, anecdotes, insights and ground-breaking research, have a highlighter and pen and paper handy—you might be encouraged to act, think more deeply about what you are doing, and get involved to truly make the most of your time and talents. Stories about individuals who have made a difference, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. Jane Goodall and Oprah Winfrey, celebrate the fact that

their greatest achievements all started with simple acts of kindness.

Students need to hear these stories. Chances are that they, too, will be inspired to show simple acts of kindness, and that their minds will be open to the possibility that they can help make the world a better place.

Creating "We" Schools: A Resource Guide for Educators can be accessed through the interactive website www.metowe.org. It includes lesson plans for each chapter of the book, web links, interactive activities and podcasts—all geared towards the development of a "We" thinking classroom or school environment by encouraging



individuals to get together, make connections and organize groups to take action on issues that they care about.

From simple steps to big actions, is the Me to We philosophy. As Marc says, "Be the change!"

Sharon McQueen is a recent graduate of the Faculty of Education at Nipissing University. She was the teacher candidate representative from that faculty to AMPA 2008.

Students need to hear these stories. Chances are that they, too, will be inspired...and that their minds will be open to the possibility that they can help make the world a better place.

WHY UNIONS MATTER

by Michael D. Yates

Published by Monthly Review
Press, 1998
US \$17
Reviewed by Stephen Lynch

In his introduction to *Why Unions Matter*, Michael D. Yates states that the purpose of his book is to provide concrete steps to make both union growth and the development of a wider movement for social change a reality. Yates, a professor of economics at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, is a committed unionist and his book is most suited to like-minded people. *Why Unions Matter* is most useful as a handbook for those already active in unions, who perhaps lack some of the historical or theoretical background that would make them more effective union activists.

Yates has divided his book into seven chapters which cover the *raison d'être* for unions, a brief history of American unions, explanations of what unions do, social issues associated with unions, and the philosophical basis for future union action. Yates does a good job backing up his claims with the use of concrete examples, personal anecdotes, and statistical. However, unless you're already in agreement with his conclusions, he does not do an effective enough job to convince fence-sitters to become staunch unionists.

I do recommend this book for people already active in a union who also feel, but perhaps do not fully understand, the connection between unionism and social justice movements. *Why Unions Matter* does an effective job of explaining the philosophical connection between unionism and social justice and is a useful tool for people such as branch presidents and district/bargaining unit presidents. If you believe that a capitalist society is not and cannot be a just one, then this is the book for you.

Stephen Lynch is the Executive Officer for OSSTF/FEESO District 10, St. Clair Region.



YOUNG MISERY

by Dr. David Palframan

Published by Creative Bound, Inc.,

Canada 2007

112 pages, \$21.95

Reviewed by Suzette Clark

This resource is a call to arms for effective treatment and support for young people suffering from depression. Beginning immediately, within his introductory remarks, Dr. Palframan provides essential information about childhood mental health, antidepressant medication and psychotherapy. He clearly defines both the clinical and practical impact of this invisible illness.

Palframan addresses in great detail the disorders that sometimes accompany depression. These include brief, but informative descriptions of such diagnoses as anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, delinquency and bipolar disorder. The section on self-mutilation provides good insight into a behaviour that is often frightening to adults who work with young people who engage in "cutting."

Case histories portray how mental health concerns manifest themselves in children and young adults. There are sections on anger, promiscuity and substance abuse and how these behaviours can be associated with a diagnosis of depression. The problem of young people who refuse treatment is addressed. Palframan discusses the impact of family life and depressed, abusive or addicted parents of depressed children.

The section on the important subject of suicide ideation contains a checklist outlining the symptoms or situations indicating an elevated risk of suicide. This should be used as a reference only. Teachers and educational workers should note this information, but they must always follow their board protocol when dealing with any risk of harm to self or others.

Although this is a very serious matter requiring the intervention of professionals, both inside and outside the school setting, Dr. Palframan's portrayal of the role of educators in the treat-

Young Misery discusses the impact of family life and depressed, abusive or addicted parents of depressed children



ment of a depressed child is best summed up with this statement, "Teachers are often part of a vulnerable child's 'compensation package.'" This book will be of great assistance in preparing educators to recognize, and support, a depressed student.

Suzette Clark is an executive assistant at OSSTF/FEESO's provincial office and works in the Educational Services Department.



ME TO WE: Finding Meaning in a Material World

Écrit par Craig Kielburger
et Marc Kielburger

Publié par John Wiley & Sons, 2007

320 pages, 16,95 \$

Critique par Sharon McQueen

Une grande source d'inspiration pour vous et votre salle de classe

EN tant qu'enseignants et travailleurs en éducation, nous sommes bien positionnés pour mettre en pratique la philosophie « Du moi au nous » (*Me to We*) qui repose sur l'amélioration de nos vies et du monde en venant en aide aux autres. Lorsque l'accent est mis davantage sur le « nous » et moins sur le « moi », de grandes choses peuvent se produire dans nos communautés, notre pays et dans le monde.

Renforcer les communautés autour de nous est le message véhiculé dans le best-seller du New York Times, *Me to We, Finding Meaning in a Material World*, écrit conjointement par Craig et Marc Kielburger d'*Enfants Entraide* (*Free the Children*). Recueil stimulant d'articles, de conseils pratiques, d'anecdotes, d'idées et de recherches inédites, ce livre en est un que vous lirez tout en ayant à la portée de main votre surligneur et votre crayon. Il vous incitera à agir, à réfléchir profondément à ce que vous faites et à travailler ensemble pour mettre réellement à profit votre temps et vos talents. Vous voyagerez aussi dans l'espace et le temps avec des personnes extraordinaires qui ont fait une différence dans le monde telles que l'archevêque Desmond Tutu, la docteure Jane Goodall et Oprah Winfrey. Vous en apprendrez davantage sur leurs plus grandes réalisations qui ont toutes commencé par de simples actes de bonté.

Les élèves doivent aussi entendre ces histoires et s'engager à recourir à de simples actes de bonté. Ils doivent être excités à l'idée qu'ils puissent aider à rendre le monde autour d'eux meilleur. Ils doivent apprendre la philosophie du moi au nous. Ce n'est



pas étonnant que le guide de ressources intitulé *Creating 'We' Schools: A Resource Guide for Educators* soit partagé, comme une trainée de poudre, entre collègues et dans les écoles partout dans le monde. Cette étonnante ressource, que l'on peut accéder à partir du site Web interactif www.metowe.org, comprend non seulement des plans de cours pour chaque chapitre du livre, mais aussi des liens Web utiles, des activités interactives et même des fichiers balados. Les partager aidera à créer une salle de classe ou un milieu scolaire axé sur le « nous » en encourageant les gens à se rassembler, à créer des liens et à organiser des groupes d'action sur les questions qui nous préoccupent.

D'étapes simples aux grandes actions, la philosophie du moi au nous est un mode de vie que ni vous ni les élèves ne pouvez manquer. Donc, partagez-le avec toutes vos connaissances et comme le dit toujours Marc : « Le changement, c'est nous! »

Sharon McQueen est une nouvelle diplômée de la faculté d'éducation de l'Université Nipissing. Elle représentait les candidats à l'enseignement de cette faculté à la RAAP 2008.

Young Misery

Écrit par **Dr. David Palframan**

Publié par Creative Bound, Inc., 2007

21,95 \$, 112 pages

Critique par Suzette Clark

Young Misery traite de l'impact sur la vie familiale et sur les parents d'enfants dépressifs qui sont toxicomanes, violents ou dépressifs

Dans ses observations préliminaires, Docteur Palframan offre aux lecteurs des renseignements essentiels sur la santé mentale des enfants, les antidépresseurs et la psychothérapie. Ce livre est un appel aux armes pour un traitement et du soutien efficaces. L'auteur cerne avec compétence les répercussions tant cliniques que réelles de cette maladie invisible.

L'auteur consacre la majeure partie de son livre à aborder les troubles qui accompagnent parfois la dépression. Cela comprend de courtes descriptions instructives de diagnostics tels que l'anxiété, le trouble obsessionnel-compulsif, les phobies, le trouble d'hyperactivité avec déficit de l'attention, la délinquance et le trouble bipolaire. Une section traitant de l'automutilation donne un bon aperçu de ce comportement qui peut souvent faire peur aux adultes qui travaillent avec des jeunes qui s'adonnent à la « mutilation ».

Les observations de cas sont utiles pour présenter comment se manifestent les préoccupations en matière de santé mentale chez les enfants et les

jeunes adultes. Les sections sur la colère, la promiscuité sexuelle et l'abus d'alcool et d'autres drogues aident le lecteur à comprendre de quelle façon ces comportements peuvent être reliés au diagnostic de la dépression. L'auteur ajoute aussi des renseignements sur les jeunes qui refusent le traitement. On traite aussi de l'impact sur la vie familiale et l'auteur donne un aperçu sur les parents d'enfants dépressifs qui sont toxicomanes, violents ou dépressifs.

L'auteur informe aussi les lecteurs sur l'importance des idées suicidaires. Un aide-mémoire décrivant les symptômes ou les situations qui indiquent un risque élevé de suicide est inclus, mais il doit servir de référence seulement. Le personnel enseignant et les travailleuses et travailleurs en éducation devraient noter ces renseignements, mais ils doivent toujours suivre le protocole de leur conseil lorsqu'ils sont confrontés à un risque pour eux-mêmes ou pour les autres.

Bien que les problèmes très graves nécessitent l'intervention de professionnels tant internes que de l'extérieur de l'école, la description faite par le Docteur Palframan du rôle des éducateurs dans le traitement des enfants dépressifs se résume bien par cette phrase : « Le personnel enseignant fait souvent la différence dans la capacité des enfants vulnérables à transiger avec leurs difficultés. » Lire ce livre aidera le personnel enseignant à jouer un rôle positif lorsqu'il traite avec un élève dépressif. 🐦

Suzette Clark est adjointe exécutive au Bureau provincial d'OSSTF/FEESO et travaille au Secteur des services éducatifs.



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CONFERENCES



Sept. 25 to 28

An Environmental Learning Gathering: Reconnect, Rethink, Rejoice

Where better to hold an environmental conference than at a UNESCO World Heritage site? The Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM) is holding its annual conference in Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland. For more information, visit www.eecom.org.

Sept. 26 to 28

Bringing us all Together
The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario is holding its annual conference at Camp Ahmek, Canoe Lake, in Algonquin Park. Outdoor practitioners and researchers will come together in roundtable meetings to celebrate their diversity and potential for learning from each other. For more information, visit www.coeo.org.

Oct. 16 to 18

Kids' Health Conference: Building Active Healthy School Communities
Elementary and secondary school teachers, principals, public health professionals and recreation leaders interested in the physical activity, health and education needs of children and youth will be interested in the Ontario Physical Health Education Association (OPHEA) annual conference at the Nottawasaga Inn in Alliston, Ontario. Workshops include innovative creative strategies for health and physical education, sport and intramural activities, a selection of health promotion topics, and assessment and evaluation tools. Early Bird registration deadline is June 27. For more information and to register, visit www.ophea.net.

Oct. 22 to 24

Stronger Together...Diversity in Education/Tous ensemble...
La diversité en éducation
OSSTF/FEESO's Educational Services Committee will host its biennial conference at the Markham Hilton Suites and Conference Centre in Markham. Keynote speakers include: David Shannon, author of *Six Degrees of Dignity*; and Marie Battiste, the 2008 recipient of the National Aboriginal Achievement Award. Workshop topics include Anti-racist Education Through Film, Engaging Educators in the Prevention of Disordered Eating and Poor Body Image Among Adolescents, and Dancing Through the Eastern Doorway. Posters and brochures will be available in September. For more information, contact Suzette Clark at clarks@osstf.on.ca. Telephone 1-800-267-7867.

Nov. 3, 4

Schools that Shine with Character
One of the most dynamic conferences of the year will be the 29th National Character Education Conference at the Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville. Keynote presenters include Dr. Eva Olsson, Barbara Coloroso, Dr. Terry Scott, Dr. Hal Urban, Stephen Lewis and Michael "Pinball" Clemons. For more information, visit www.ncec.ca or contact Ian McTavish at ncecregistration@tlds.on.ca, or call 705-789-5594.

Nov. 12 to 14

ECOO 2008
The 29th annual conference of the Educational Computing Organization of Ontario is being held at the Sheraton Parkway Hotel and Conference Centre, 600 Highway 7 East, Richmond Hill. For more information, visit www.ecoo.org.

Workers' Health and Safety Centre
The Workers' Centre has more than 100 hazard-specific awareness programs for delivery. For more information, visit www.whsc.on.ca

Visit OSSTF/FEESO's website for an up-to-date listing of conferences, www.osstf.on.ca under "Training." /MC

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Continued from page 14/ the stage and some of us sit and wonder how it was made possible.

Policy emphasis needs to go back to where it looks at the roots. The kids need to have basic demonstrable skills that include a sense of personal responsibility for their behaviour, academic ability, and respect for their peers and others. The recent weakening of discipline in Bill 212 (An Act to increase respect and responsibility, to set standards for safe learning and safe teaching in schools and to amend the Teaching Profession Act), shows that the emphasis is more on keeping kids in school, regardless of their behaviour, than it is on making kids take responsibility for their own actions.

We must have a discipline policy that starts with the basics—keeping students in the mindset that respect is paramount in the school environment; we can’t just deal with specific exotic behaviours. We must have textbooks for compulsory courses before we worry about having courses that are not even going to be offered at most schools. Finally, we must have policies that make our students responsible adults, rather than creating



an environment where they expect almost everything will be handed to them on a silver platter.

It is my sincere wish that those teacher candidates keep coming into my office and that they keep thinking about the trees. I also hope that someone who is in a position to make change can see that the tree is in serious trouble if we tend only to the branches, while the roots lack water and nutrients.

Adam Mercer is a teacher with the Durham District School Board.



Last Word

By Ken Coran, President

Mot de la fin par Ken Coran, président

Strong, locally negotiated collective agreements

A provincial priority

The eleven “Objects” of OSSTF/FEESO, listed in the provincial constitution, are the fundamental principles by which this union governs its work on behalf of its members. They are the foundation upon which all of our policies are built, and not surprisingly, the first three Objects all deal specifically with the protection of members.

The single most significant act of protection relates to collective bargaining. All of the teachers’ bargaining unit contracts, and many of the support staff bargaining unit contracts, expire on August 31, 2008, and so, at every level of union leadership, OSSTF/FEESO has been working hard to prepare for the largest round of bargaining in our history.

Most, if not all, of you have already filled in your local Collective Bargaining Committee’s (CBC) survey and have indicated your priorities for the next collective agreement. Based on that input, your unit’s CBC has developed the negotiating brief from which they will work at the negotiating table with your employer to make improvements to your contract.

Many units have already sent letters to their employers indicating their desire to begin negotiating as soon as possible, with the intent to have new collective agreements in place prior to the expiry of the current ones.

At the same time, talks are continuing at the provincial discussion tables. There are two officially recognized advisory bodies providing advice to the Provincial Executive in this regard—the Ad Hoc Advisory Workgroups, and the provincial Collective Bargaining Committee. Our mandate at the provincial discussion tables is clear—to lobby for adequate funding to permit successful local bargaining. We have not ventured from this mandate, however, the funding released in the Ontario Budget on March 25 and the subsequent “Grants for Student Needs,” did not include resources earmarked for bargaining. It has been made very clear that the results of the provincial discussion tables will drive this additional funding. This fact was reiterated at an education partnership table meeting on March 25.

At the provincial discussion tables, we have highlighted the issues we wanted to bring forward because they are impacted by funding. Those issues include: staffing and workload, along with the obvious ones of funding for salaries and benefits. Our challenge has been how to inform the funding without limiting bargaining of local priorities.

Des conventions fortes négociées à l’échelon local

Une priorité provinciale

L’11^e « but » d’OSSTF/FEESO, inscrit dans ses statuts, représente les principes fondamentaux qui guident le travail du syndicat pour ses membres. Ils constituent la base sur laquelle l’ensemble de nos politiques reposent et personne ne s’étonnera de constater que les trois premiers buts traitent précisément de la protection des membres.

L’action la plus importante de protection se rapporte à la négociation collective. Toutes les conventions des unités de négociation du personnel enseignant et de plusieurs unités du personnel de soutien arrivent à échéance le 31 août 2008. De ce fait, OSSTF/FEESO travaille avec acharnement avec tous les paliers de dirigeants syndicaux en vue de se préparer à la plus grande ronde de négociation de son histoire.

La plupart d’entre vous, sinon chacun de vous, avez déjà eu l’occasion de remplir votre sondage local du Comité de négociation collective (CNC) afin de préciser vos priorités pour la prochaine négociation collective. Le CNC de votre unité a élaboré, en fonction de vos commentaires, la requête de négociation qui servira de base pour les discussions avec votre employeur, à la table de négociation, dans le but d’améliorer votre convention.

Plusieurs unités ont déjà envoyé des lettres à leurs employeurs leur mentionnant l’intention d’entreprendre la négociation le plus rapidement possible dans le but d’avoir de nouvelles conventions collectives en vigueur à l’expiration de celle actuelle.

En même temps, les discussions se poursuivent aux tables rondes provinciales. Deux groupes sont reconnus officiellement pour conseiller l’Exécutif provincial à cet égard : les groupes consultatifs spéciaux et le Comité provincial de négociation collective. Notre objectif aux tables rondes provinciales est clair : faire des pressions afin d’obtenir le financement adéquat pour assurer la réussite de la négociation locale. Nous n’avons pas fait de progrès; toutefois, les fonds annoncés dans le budget de l’Ontario du 25 mars et, par la suite, la subvention pour les besoins des élèves, ne comprenaient pas les ressources destinées à la négociation. Il nous apparaît très évident que les résultats des tables rondes provinciales apporteront ces fonds additionnels. Cette réalité a été réaffirmée lors de la rencontre du 25 mars de la Table de partenariat en éducation.

Aux tables rondes provinciales, nous avons identifié des dossiers que nous voulions faire avancer, car le financement a un



Last Word *continued/*

At the next provincial discussion table meetings, scheduled for May 12 and 13 for support staff and May 14 and 15 for teachers/occasional teachers, we expect that the government will present us with the funding levels that are to be allocated to school boards for local bargaining. We are not optimistic that the funding levels provided will be sufficient to support good local collective agreements.

If getting the best agreement requires conciliation, strike votes and sanctions, we will do what needs to be done. We want to give local bargaining the best chance to succeed. At this time,

If getting the best agreement requires conciliation, strike votes and sanctions, we will do what needs to be done

we are, as usual, monitoring and coordinating local bargaining.

In some of our units, the bargaining is well underway. Four support staff units in District 25-Ottawa Carleton have already had strong strike votes and are now in strike position. Several other support staff units have also begun negotiating, and one francophone unit is receiving formal provincial assistance. Our newest bargaining unit, the support staff of the University of Ottawa, is negotiating its first contract, and the negotiations for the Brock University support staff have gone into conciliation.

There is one further dynamic to the provincial picture—there are also other discussion tables, one each for the other teacher affiliates, one for CUPE support staff units, and one representing a number of other smaller or non-union support staff groups. They each have their own priorities and the government will present funding levels at those tables as well. As this column was being written, all of the other discussion tables were scheduled to meet between April 28 and May 22.

Rest assured, however, that what happens at other tables will absolutely not drive what happens at the OSSTF/FEESO discussion tables. OSSTF/FEESO has always led the way in bargaining and this round will be no different. We will continue to work towards setting the stage for successful collective agreements bargained at local negotiating tables, as we have always done.

And, as we do so, I ask you once again to stay informed, to get involved at your local branch or bargaining unit, and to support your local leaders and bargaining teams as they work to ensure that your working conditions are not only protected, but improved.

Mot de la fin *suite/*

impact sur eux. Ils comprennent la dotation et la charge de travail et évidemment les fonds pour les salaires et les avantages sociaux. Notre problème porte sur la façon d'influencer le financement sans limiter la négociation des priorités locales.

Nous nous attendons à ce que le gouvernement nous présentera les niveaux de financement alloués à la négociation locale pour chaque conseil scolaire lors des rencontres prévues les 12 et 13 mai pour le personnel de soutien et les 14 et 15 mai pour le personnel enseignant/enseignant suppléant. Nous ne sommes pas très optimistes que les niveaux de financement soient suffisants pour négocier de bonnes conventions collectives.

S'il faut avoir recours à la conciliation, à des votes de grève ou à des sanctions pour obtenir la meilleure entente, nous ferons ce qui doit être fait. Nous voulons donner la meilleure chance de réussir à la négociation locale. En ce moment, nous surveillons et coordonnons la négociation locale, comme à l'habitude.

La négociation progresse dans quelques-unes de nos unités. Quatre unités du personnel de soutien du district 25, Ottawa-Carleton, ont déjà obtenu un vote de grève très solide et se retrouvent maintenant en

position légale de grève. Plusieurs autres unités du personnel de soutien ont aussi débuté la négociation et une unité francophone reçoit l'aide officielle du Bureau provincial. Notre toute dernière unité de négociation, le personnel de soutien de l'Université d'Ottawa, négocie sa première convention et la conciliation a été demandée pour le personnel de soutien de l'Université Brock.

Une autre dynamique s'ajoute à la situation provinciale: il y a d'autres tables rondes, une pour chacune des affiliés du personnel enseignant, une pour les unités du personnel de soutien du SCFP et une autre représentant les groupes non syndiqués de personnel de soutien ou les groupes moins nombreux. Chacune d'entre elles ont leurs propres priorités et le gouvernement présentera également à ces tables les niveaux de financement. Au moment de la rédaction, toutes les autres tables rondes doivent se rencontrer à diverses dates entre le 28 avril et le 22 mai.

Toutefois, soyez certains que peu importe ce qui se passe aux autres tables, cela n'influencera absolument pas le déroulement des tables rondes d'OSSTF/FEESO. Nous avons toujours été le chef de file en matière de négociation et cette ronde ne sera pas différente. Nous continuerons à préparer la voie en vue de conclure de bonnes conventions collectives négociées aux tables de négociation locales, comme nous l'avons toujours fait.

Entre-temps, je vous demanderais encore une fois de vous informer, de participer au sein de votre unité de négociation locale et d'appuyer vos équipes de négociation et vos dirigeants locaux alors qu'ils s'assurent que vos conditions de travail soient non seulement protégées, mais améliorées.



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