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 Elementary Teachers'
Federation of Ontario
Fédération des enseignantes et des
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oice



Teaching with technology

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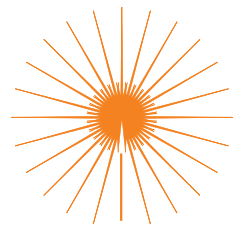
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On our cover: Jane Smith and Nathan Toft from A Lorne Cassidy School in Ottawa–Carlton. Photo: Brigitte Bouvier, CP Images.

FROM THE EDITOR

Solving problems with our home computer (and passing ourselves off as technologically savvy) was a lot easier before our son went away to university. As a teenager he was our in-house expert, introducing us to new technology that we didn't know we had to have.

When it comes to technology it seems kids are generally at the leading edge and adults often struggle to keep up. Not so for the ETFO members featured in this issue who are taking advantage of children's love affair with all things technological. Beginning on page 11 they describe three different approaches to using technology to enhance student learning.

One of this issue's feature writers, Cindy Matthews, was a presenter at ETFO's Information and Communications Technology Conference for Women, always a popular event. It is one of many professional learning opportunities ETFO has developed for its members. ETFO is a leading provider of workshops, conferences, and resources to boost members' professional skills. Some of these are highlighted in *Your Federation*, the pages in this magazine devoted to news about ETFO. You can find others by visiting our website, etfo.ca and clicking on Professional Development. The next big block of opportunities for members is provided by this year's Summer Academy. Be sure to check it out.

As all ETFO members know, not all professional learning is created equal. ETFO's programs are highly regarded by members because they typify the qualities associated with the best kind of professional learning. "It's up to you" (page 9) outlines these qualities and describes the political battles teachers and their federations have fought to protect their professionalism.

ETFO's role in protecting and enhancing teacher professionalism will be particularly in the forefront this year as new collective agreements are negotiated. Improving working conditions and ensuring they apply across the province is the focus of the current round of negotiations, as President David Clegg points out in his column (page 4).

Finally, this magazine is for you. Let us know your thoughts and opinions about any of the articles we publish. Send your letters to jbrand@etfo.org with the word "Letter" in the subject line.


JOHANNA BRAND

Voice

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consumer content; 75% Canadian-produced pulp.

Re: Attawapiskat campaign

I'm writing to urge members to get involved in a campaign for a school in the First Nations community of Attawapiskat on the James Bay coast.

When it opened in 1976 the J.R. Nakogee Elementary School in Attawapiskat was a source of community pride and a community gathering place as well as a school. In 1999, because of fumes from a long-undetected leaking diesel fuel tank under it, the school was condemned. Its 400 students were "temporarily" (according to Indian and Native Affairs Canada) placed into portable classrooms. Today Attawapiskat children are still in those "temporary" portables.

Three years ago, Charlie Angus, the MP for the Timmins-James Bay riding, encouraged students at Iroquois Falls Public School to speak out for Attawapiskat and we began a letter writing campaign (see Voice, Summer 2005).

Another campaign is well underway. This time we are using homemade postcards about 17cm X 11cm, with student drawings on the front and a message on the back addressed to Chuck Strahl, the current minister of Indian Affairs.

Charlie Angus' website, atawapiskat.com, has more information including a You Tube video and the address for Chuck Strahl.

I urge ETFO members to use this opportunity to bring social studies to life in the classroom and support our campaign.

Chi Megweech/Thank you.

Fran Côté

retired teacher, Ontario North East District School Board

WRITE TO VOICE

We welcome your feedback.

Send your letters by email to jbrand@etfo.org ; by mail or fax to the address on the masthead.

Remember:

- Keep your comments short and to the point (150-200 words).
- Letters should relate directly to articles in the magazine.
- Provide contact information, including a telephone number and the board where you work.
- Letters may be edited.



Re: It's Child's Play... And It Matters! (February 2008)

Thank you for this insightful article about "play" meeting curriculum expectations in kindergarten. How many times have kindergarten teachers commented, "My students don't have time to play, we are too busy engaged in work"? Play IS the independent work of children.

I have maintained centres for structure and and free play in my classroom and feel that my students benefit from the variety of activities that help to enrich oral communication, interpersonal skills, and their imaginations. For example, they play checkers (math and problem solving), make playdough bird's nests (science), read to dolls (language), dance to the Dinosaur Rock (music), build ramps and create puppet plays (drama), and make boats out of boxes at the craft table (fine-motor skills).

We need to remember that children need a balance of work, play, and physical and emotional wellness at school too!

Susan Ross

ETFO member, Durham District School Board



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DAVID CLEGG

President, ETFO

Equality for Elementary Teachers Means Closing the Gap

As you know ETFO collective agreements expire at the end of August and bargaining for new agreements is underway.

During the last round of negotiations ETFO led the way in forging a precedent setting provincial framework that improved working conditions across the province. For example each teacher collective agreement provided for 200 minutes of preparation time and 80 minutes of supervision time by the end of the collective agreement.

The federation is once again involved in talks at the provincial level. The provincial government is facilitating negotiations between ETFO and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) with the aim of reaching agreement on those collective agreement provisions that have significant costs associated with them and/or have province-wide implications. As was the case in the last round, bargaining will also take place at the local level. It is local bargaining that addresses the issues unique to each school district.

The focus of all our efforts in this round of negotiations is to close the gap in working conditions between teachers in the elementary and secondary panels. You will likely have seen pamphlets that outline our concerns about paid time to complete student assessments; increased support for new parents in the form of salary top-ups for pregnancy and parental leaves; and the elimination of teaching time for principals and vice-principals. If you have not seen these pamphlets please request one from your school steward. (You can also see them by going to etfo.ca ► *Collective bargaining ► Pamphlets.*)

Over the next few months you will receive more information about the federation's bargaining goals. You will be called to local meetings to receive information and vote on the preliminary submission – the document that outlines the demands for your new collective agreement. At those meetings you will also hear more about the progress of the provincial talks.

The Minister of Education has stated that she is looking for “peace and progress” for this term of government. We share her ideal. Peace and progress are what our students, our members, and our schools deserve. From our perspective, there cannot be peace without progress. That progress must include closing the gap in the respect – and the working conditions that accompany respect – afforded to teachers in the elementary and secondary panels. School boards particularly need to understand that peace and progress requires all teaching employees be treated with the same level of respect.

To make right a century of discrimination in the treatment of elementary students and teachers is a daunting task. I know you believe that your working conditions and the learning conditions of your students are equally as important as those of secondary teachers.

History has taught us that discrimination seldom ends without turmoil. You can expect to be challenged as you stand up for what is right for you and your students. It is our strength and solidarity that will finally close the gap in working conditions for elementary teachers.



GENE LEWIS

General Secretary, ETFO

Responding to the School Effectiveness Framework

During the past year the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) released the new *School Effectiveness Framework: A Collegial Process for Continued Growth in the Effectiveness of Ontario Schools*.

This framework is a further development of the Ministry's focus on underperforming schools that began several years ago with the "The Turn-around Strategy" and in 2006-2007 morphed into the Ontario Focused Intervention Program, which involved some 800 schools throughout the province. Those programs were intended to help schools and boards identify effective strategies to improve student achievement, which the Ministry now wants all schools to have in place.

The framework is meant to be a tool to allow educators and school boards to evaluate their own performance and that of their school, identify areas where improvements are needed, and make plans to address areas of need.

The LNS has indicated that the framework is meant to promote focused, consistent, and collaborative planning for school improvement across the province. The LNS also believes that the framework provides a way for educators to determine if they are consistently using 'research-based, effective strategies.' While it is difficult to fault the goals of the LNS, the implementation at the school and board level is sometimes problematic.

Even though this is meant to be a pilot year, participation is mandatory for all schools and all district school boards. During this pilot year ETFO will monitor implementation, research the impact on members, and then make informed decisions and recommendations to members.

We believe the intent of the LNS is well inten-

tioned, but the process that has been developed is largely untested. There may be a better way both to affirm success and to accomplish the improvements in schools and in teaching that the LNS wishes to achieve. One part of this complex process involves superintendents and their teams visiting classrooms and recording data. This is bound to have an intimidating effect, whether it's intended or not. Despite LNS assurances to the contrary, it would not be abnormal for teachers to feel that their routines are being disrupted and their performance is being evaluated.

The amount of extra work for teachers – additional record keeping, more meetings sometimes after school and during lunch breaks – is also a concern. Charged with delivering a rigidly structured curriculum, often in split grades, more meetings and more bureaucratic 'assessments' is not what teachers need. Moreover, implementing the framework can lead to schools and teachers focusing narrowly on literacy and numeracy and increasing EQAO scores, rather than promoting the development of the whole child and looking at school effectiveness in a holistic way.

How a teacher should respond to the School Effectiveness Framework

The framework is now available on line. Take the time to read it and familiarize yourself with its intent.

- Speak to your school steward and/or your local president if you have concerns about the way this initiative is being handled in your school. For example, it would be inappropriate if an individual or a group shows up at your classroom door without having given you prior notice and wants to observe your class.
- Contact your federation if you have any concerns that administrators are using this initiative to evaluate performance.
- If the school staff receives feedback about observations and any individual teacher or classroom is identified, you should call your local immediately.
- Email any concerns you have regarding implementation of the School Effectiveness Framework to sef@etfo.org. These emails will not be responded to but will be compiled to provide feedback to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Minister of Education.

ETFO MEMBERS who are innovating with technology are taking part in a new professional development program, **Innoteach**. At their first meeting, each member of the core group submitted one technology-based curriculum document or learning object for discussion. This peer review will continue as they work online to further refine and clarify their projects. The final products will be made available on the ETFO website. Having received training in the process of critiquing and refining their practice, the original team will become mentors and leaders for the next generation of participants. Innoteach is one of the projects made possible by professional development funding from the Ministry of Education.



CHARLES PASCAL (above left, with ETFO President David Clegg), the province's early learning advisor, attended the March meeting of the ETFO Executive to discuss his mandate. Pascal is to make recommendations on how the province will implement the **full-day kindergarten** program promised in the 2007 election. He will submit his first report to Premier Dalton McGuinty next year.



PERFECTING YOUR PRESENTATION SKILLS Consultants and coordinators who are ETFO members had an opportunity to learn about the theory and practical aspects of creating effective presentations from Lynn Sewell and Robert Garmston, internationally renowned facilitators. Participants learned about techniques to deliver highly effective presentations and about how to read and respond to audience cues, and they experienced a variety of proven strategies to engage all types of participants.

Rod Michano, Francesca Dobbyn, Colleen Purdon, and playwright David Craig, (shown from left), as well as Shirange Raje, and Dawnmarie Harriott are featured in ETFO's **One in Six** documentary. The title reflects the statistic that one in every six Ontario children live in poverty. The film is designed to heighten teachers' awareness of poverty and its impact on their students. Its launch at a special screening at the National Film Board of Canada included a question-and-answer session with the participants who represent the groups most affected by poverty – Aboriginal people, single women, immigrants, and people with disabilities. A DVD of the documentary was distributed to every public elementary school in Ontario this spring. To view the film, speak to your school steward.



BEYOND THE WORKSHOP PRESENTER'S PALETTE is Part 2 of a program designed to polish members' presentation and facilitation skills. Participants were experienced presenters who wanted to re-energize and refine their presentations.



THE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE the way they use computers in the classroom drew 100 women members to ETFO's **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Conference** in February. The conference helps members increase their comfort level with various aspects of technology. Among the variety of workshops offered were those showing members how to create websites, blogs and podcasts and how to integrate them into classroom practice.



EDUCATORS FROM BENIN came to ETFO for a three-day workshop on early childhood education and the role of play. Offered in collaboration with Right To Play, the workshop focused on brain development, child development, research on best practices in early childhood education, integration of play into curriculum documents and curriculum implementation. Right To Play representatives from Benin and Rwanda also took part.



...AND STILL WE RISE The eighth annual leadership and personal growth conference for women was attended by 400 members from across the province. Participants heard from Laura Robinson, a former member of the national cycling team and an award-winning writer and filmmaker. Janet Romero-Leiva, who immigrated to Canada from Chile at the age of seven, presented a dramatic storytelling. Members took part in leadership skills and personal growth workshops. The conference also featured a variety of women artists and performers.





It's Up to You

■ by ETFO staff

Participating in professional learning outside the school day is your decision

It is five o'clock, and the agenda indicates that the staff meeting should be wrapping up, but the principal mentions some interesting trends in the recently released schoolwide scores and asks staff to stay and discuss them. As a staff member, you feel that there may be merit to the discussion, but you did not get advance notice, you're tired, and you have other commitments. You want to leave but the principal is asking you to remain.

This situation happens frequently in schools throughout the province and illustrates the misuse of staff meetings and the misunderstanding of professional learning. In making your decision about whether or not to stay at a staff meeting such as the one described above ETFO urges you to consider

- the role of staff meetings
- teachers' obligations to attend meetings outside normal working hours
- the nature of effective professional learning.

ETFO's policy

Staff meetings are intended primarily to deal with administrative and operational matters in a school. A good administrator will consult staff about the meeting

agenda and will ensure that it ends at the agreed-upon time. Professional learning should occur at staff meetings only if teachers have been consulted and have agreed to take part. Teachers should feel free to leave if a staff meeting extends beyond the agreed-upon time.

Effective professional learning is voluntary and chosen by the individual participant to meet her or his learning needs. It recognizes that teachers are professionals. It gives teachers a chance to be engaged with the ideas presented and with their colleagues. It provides teachers with the time and opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise. It either occurs as part of the normal workday or is voluntary.

Participation in any form of professional development outside the instructional day is voluntary. Teachers may choose to participate in employer-

provided professional learning during a school staff meeting if they feel that it meets their professional needs.

The importance of teacher choice

Why does ETFO feel it's important to underline its beliefs about staff meetings and professional learning? Safeguarding teachers' right to determine their own professional development has been a critical issue for ETFO and its members. In 1999, the Conservative government led by Mike Harris introduced a plan to force teachers to complete 14 mandatory professional development courses every five years to maintain their certificates. The government delegated the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) to carry out the plan. The way that the college implemented the plan is one reason ETFO members still feel bitter toward the college.

You are required to attend board-mandated professional development that takes place during the school day. Professional development that takes place outside the school day is your decision. Attending a staff meeting that extends beyond the instructional day is also your decision. School administrators should not make professional development part of staff meetings without consulting with staff.



This highly offensive plan met with widespread opposition from individual teachers and their federations.

Through its *Accountability YES/Recertification NO* campaign, ETFO took a lead role in opposing the government and mobilizing members to defy policies that attacked the fundamental principle of teachers' professionalism: their right and responsibility to determine what is best for their own professional growth and for their students. The vast majority of ETFO members put their professional careers on the line by defying the law that required them to take OCT-approved courses that were reported to and registered with the college.

Teachers and their federations boycotted any professional development programs that were registered with the college. They returned to OCT letters telling them they were to be part of the first retesting cycle. They wrote letters to the college registrar, signed a petition of nonconfidence, returned their copies of the college's magazine, *Professionally Speaking*, and participated in a rally at Queen's Park.

The federation also lobbied the government. ETFO's position paper, *Ensuring High Professional Standards in Ontario Education*, showed how ineffective the government's plan was, and outlined better ways to ensure teacher competency.

In 2003 when Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government was elected, it moved quickly to cancel the recertification program and the test for new teachers. A new consultation process allowed teacher federations to work with the Ministry of Education to develop an effective model of professional learning.

The working table on teacher professional learning published its report in

2007. The report noted that "there is no single model of professional learning that can fulfill all the needs of experienced teachers. There is also no single, linear pathway or career trajectory for teachers . . . there must be respect for the complexity of the teacher's professional journey and trust that teachers,

on this journey, will make choices that ultimately benefit their students."¹

The working table also outlined five characteristics of effective professional learning that teachers can use as guidelines to ensure that staff development and/or professional learning is meeting their professional needs.

Professional learning must be

- **Coherent** – recognizing teacher professionalism and the complexity of teacher learning. It is built on the "three Rs"² of respect, responsibility, and results.
- **Attentive to adult learning styles** – recognizing that teachers possess a wealth of knowledge and a variety of experiences. Research supports the importance of choice and self-direction in professional learning. The participant must view the learning as meaningful, relevant, and substantive. The model should fit the culture of the school and promote collaboration. Participants should be recognized when they successfully complete professional learning.
- **Goal-oriented** – and clearly connected to student learning and daily practice. It should relate to relevant ministry, board, school, and community contexts.
- **Sustainable** – and supported with the appropriate resources. Participants must have time to practise and consolidate the learning, and time for self-assessment through reflection. When possible, it should include all staff who support student learning.
- **Evidence-informed** – taking into consideration current research. It is built on both quantitative and qualitative evidence, including the knowledge and experience of teachers.

Professional learning gains credibility when school boards consider it important enough that they

- provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate during the day
- provide occasional teacher coverage for relief
- ensure that it takes place on professional activity days and is not added onto the end of a hectic workday.

Today, as ETFO members face increasing pressure to participate in professional development related to the myriad of ministry and school board initiatives, we can't afford to forget the principle of voluntary, self-directed professional learning we fought so vigorously for less than a decade ago. ✓

NOTES

1. *Report to the Partnership Table on Teacher Professional Learning*, p.5. Available at edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/pdfs/partnerReport.pdf
2. *Ontario Education Excellence for All: Developing Partners in Education*, Dec. 2005, p. 1. Available at edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/05.12/developing.pdf.

Teaching with technology



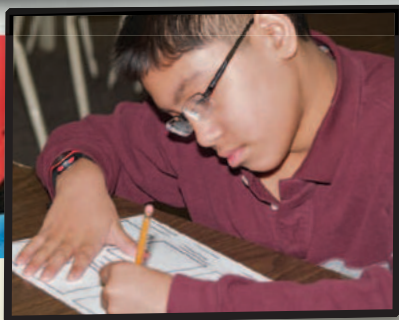
Today's students have grown up with technology. Cell phones, MP3 players, You Tube, wikis, and blogs are part of their everyday lives. When they are misused, these technologies are the bane of a teacher's existence. But they can also be good friends.

In a recent issue of *ASCD Express* Tracy Poelzer writes: "By integrating information and communications technology (ICT) into learning opportunities at school, educators can engage even the most reluctant students in literacy activities—sometimes without their even knowing it."*

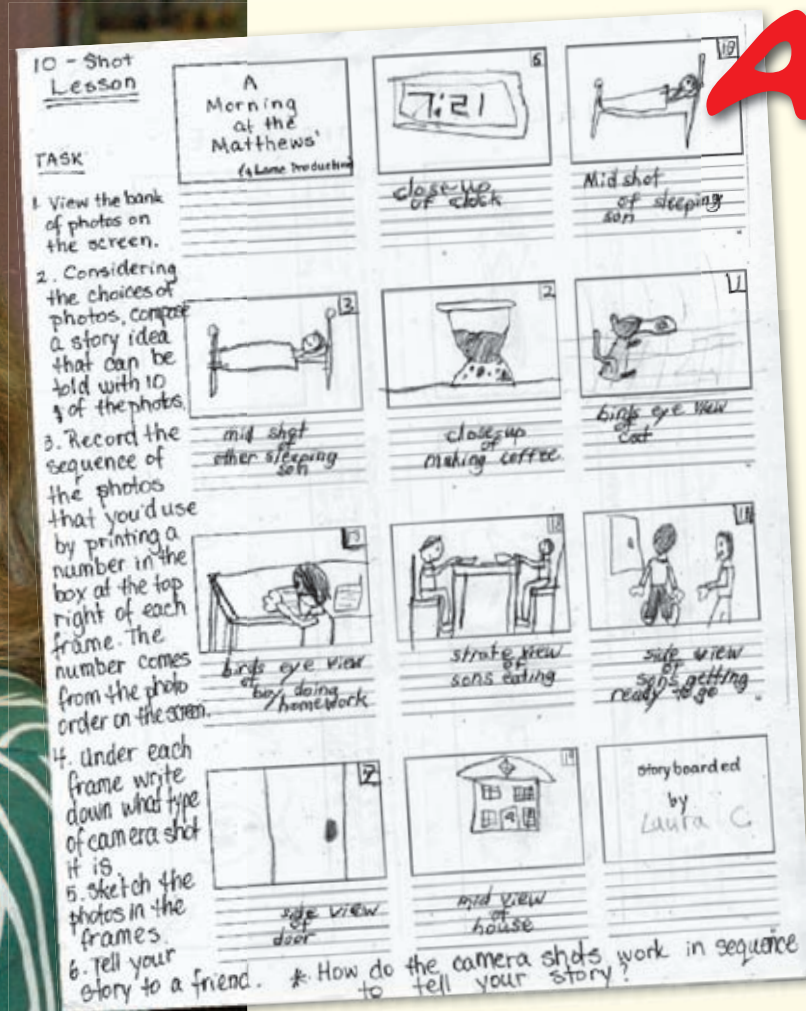
In the next several pages you will meet educators who would certainly agree. In Ottawa-Carleton, Jane Smith and Nathan Toft and their students are the creators of *Portable Radio.ca* that features student podcasts that have been aired on mainstream radio. Mali Balick and her colleagues in Simcoe are engaging students in global learning, and finding that even reluctant writers step up to the plate when talking to friends far away. In Toronto, Cindy Matthews takes advantage of students' fascination with comics and graphic novels, while André Charlebois offers suggestions for teachers of French. All are making use of technology to engage their students in a variety of literacy activities, develop their critical abilities, and improve their second language skills. All are finding an ally in the wired world.

* Tracy Poelzer. "Looking Beyond the Books; Using ICT to Engage Reluctant Male Learners in Literacy Activities." Vol. 3, Issue 12, March 20, 2008. Available at ascd.org/ascd-express/archived-issues.

A COMIC LIFE...



■ by Cindy Matthews



INSTRUCTIONAL COMICS WERE USED IN MID-1900S PAMPHLETS AND CATALOGUES. USING VISUAL IMAGERY AND COMIC LIFE SOFTWARE TO CREATE PROCEDURAL WRITING TEXTS IS AN ENGAGING WAY FOR STUDENTS TO DEMONSTRATE SCIENTIFIC AND MATHEMATICAL UNDERSTANDINGS.

As a storytelling medium, comics have come of age in the last few decades. With an enduring history in North America as a venue for superhero quests, they have entertained many a young reader. When Will Eisner published *A Contract with God* in 1978, comics took a step forward and the graphic novel was born.

Graphic novels have become the obsessive read for our students. They are enthusiastic about the easier to read ones such as *Sardine* and *Baby-mouse Queen of the World*, and about the meticulously researched Age of Bronze series. There's something for everyone: from girls' favourites such as *Amelia Rules!* to the ever popular Bone series to those that are popular with teens, like *Re-Gifters* and *Full Metal Alchemist*.

Many titles lend themselves to fruitful literature circle conversations. The cross-cultural explorations of *American Born Chinese* and *The Arrival* are two fine examples. The more didactic series such as *Phonics Comics* and the *Timeline* sets can serve as updated teaching tools. *Phonics Comics* is a line of phonetically based easy-readers designed as comic books. The *Timeline* titles draw readers into curriculum-linked historical stories. (They come with teacher's guides.) In-depth curricular connections are possible with powerful historical fiction like *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* and *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography*.

The proliferation of this literary form and the growing collections of graphic narrative titles in our classrooms and school libraries are tangible evidence of the joy students' take from reading and of their engagement with this form of expression. Integrating technology with the study of comics, using software like *Comic Life*, can breathe new life into learning.¹

Photos: Johanna Brand



INTRODUCING COMIC LIFE SOFTWARE

TO HELP STUDENTS VISUALIZE THE FINAL PRODUCTS THEY WILL CREATE USING THE COMIC LIFE SOFTWARE, SHARE SOME SAMPLE PIECES FROM THE GALLERY AT PLASQ.COM OR FROM THOSE SHOWN IN CHARLES THACKER'S ARTICLE.

FOLLOW UP WITH MINI-LESSONS TO MODEL THE DEVELOPMENT OF TWO COMIC PAGES, USING THE SOFTWARE, THE EASY-TO-USE HELP MENU, AND A SAMPLE PHOTO BANK (10-12 PHOTOS IN .JPG FORMAT) OF A SIMPLE SUBJECT. I USED PHOTOS OF MY FAMILY GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL AND WORK ONE MORNING. I HAD STUDENTS CREATE A STORYBOARD (SEE SAMPLE ON PAGE 13) USING THE PHOTOS AND THEN I CREATED THE COMIC WHILE THE STUDENTS WATCHED ON THE PROJECTION SCREEN.

HAVING LOADED THE SAME PHOTOS ON EACH OF THE STUDENTS' COMPUTERS, I LET THEM EXPLORE THE SOFTWARE AS I SUPPORTED THEM THROUGH THIS GUIDED CREATION. ONCE THEY HAD CREATED VISUALS, I PROMPTED THEM TO ADD DIALOGUE. AS A REFLECTION PIECE, I ENGAGED THEM IN A PEER REVIEW OF THEIR STORY SCRIPTS, HAVING THEM USE THEIR NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONVENTIONS.

To capitalize on students' engagement with graphic novels, let's take a look at how to develop a comics unit as part of teaching media literacy. Here is a list of learning activities to support your students' reading and deconstruction of the visual language of comics. As the students hone their visual literacy skills, they will begin to understand what Will Eisner calls the "grammar of sequential art."²

1. Begin with a comparison of magazine cartoons, comics, and graphic novels. Focus on the basic conventions: fonts, images, drawing style, inking for outline, icons, panels, colour or black and white design, dialogue, action, and characters.
2. Be explicit with the vocabulary of the genre, such as *gutter* and *panel-to-panel transitions*.³
3. Have students review familiar graphic novels to identify examples of the conventions.
4. As a think-pair-share activity, have the students record (draw and label) examples of font (for titles and sound effects), panel shapes, word bubbles (e.g., whisper = dash lines, speech bubble, thought bubble, etc.), and captions, also known as narrative (text) boxes.
5. Discuss the different kinds and uses of word bubble tails (sharp angle for terse dialogue, slight curve for calm voice, extended for far-away or offstage dialogue), as they relate to character development and mood.
6. To explore the text and production conventions of the genre, lead more advanced students to study page layout and panel transitions. Highlight the concept of "the power of suggestion" that "lies in the gutter."
7. Discuss "the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible"⁴ in panel design and illustration choice as they relate to story development.
8. Have students review familiar graphic novels to identify samples of the transitions.

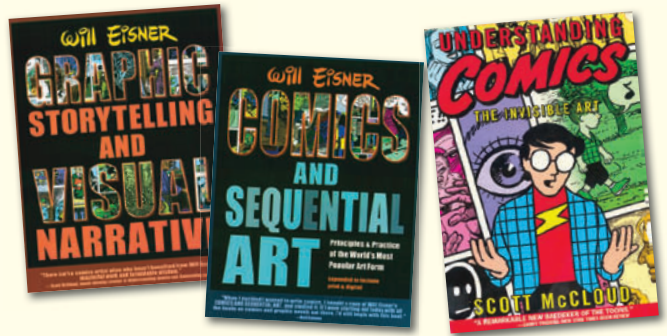
A SIDELINE MEDIA LITERACY LESSON CAN FOCUS ON THE SKILL OF CREATING EFFECTIVE CAMERA SHOTS AND USING CAMERA ANGLES. THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES ARE HELPFUL:

MEDIACOLLEGE.COM/VIDEO/SHOTS; ACCAD.OSU.EDU/MIDORI/MATERIALS/CAMERA.HTML; MEDIACKNOWALL.COM/CAMANGLES.HTML

FOR STUDENT HANDOUTS USE THE STICK FIGURE ILLUSTRATIONS FOUND AT NEWI.AC.UK/ENGLISHRESOURCES/WORKUNITS/K54/MEDIA/CAMSHOTS.HTML

TEACHER RESOURCES

FOR THE UNINITIATED THERE ARE GOOD RESOURCES BOTH IN HARD COPY AND ONLINE. CHARLES THACKER PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW AND A STEP-BY-STEP INTRODUCTION TO COMIC LIFE SOFTWARE AT MACINSTRUCT.COM/NODE/169. SCOTT MCCLLOUD'S *UNDERSTANDING COMICS* IS A TEXTBOOK WRITTEN IN COMIC BOOK STYLE.



WRITING STORIES FOR COMICS

To lead into writing for comics, share with the students the secret of successful storytelling: Show, Don't Tell. Following this dictum requires succinct use of text.

Students start with a writing plan. As a story outline, it may begin with sketches to visualize the characters and setting and/or a story map to list aspects of the setting, characters, plot, problem, and resolution. This is the springboard for a prose summary of the storyline. Once they have drafted their writing plan, the students write a script with dialogue for their character(s) and captions for narration. Following the usual steps in the writing process, the students have their work peer-edited, revise it, and have it approved by the teacher.

Next students have to decide on the visuals they will use. Younger students may choose to draw pictures or create scenes with toys such as Lego, stuffed animals, or action figures. You can take simple shots of these displays with a digital camera and load them into a photo bank. Or you can scan the images they draw on paper. If students are not using computers, you can print these out for them.

Students can also use photos they have taken with a digital camera. They can use the school's digital camera, bring their own cameras to school, or bring in a file from home on a USB memory stick or CD. They will need around 20 photos for their photo bank. Remind them to consider the mood of their story, which should inform their decisions when taking photos. This leads to the "10-Shot Lesson"⁵: students select 10 usable photos to tell their story or reflect the mood of a topic. With background lessons on basic photography skills, students can make informed decisions for their photo selections (see sidebar).

Students storyboard their tale by sketching images of the 10 selected photos, in sequence, and noting the dialogue from their scripts. The storyboard template is an organizational tool. You can find many examples online. I use a simple six-square template, with three lines below each box. These serve as a way to sequence the visuals and match the dialogue. The sketches are quick stick-figure representations of the photo image, just to capture the visual. Ask the students to label each sketch as to the camera shot and angle, using their understandings from the photography lesson.

USE COMIC LIFE TO HELP BREAK DOWN COMPLEX IDEAS AND TO CREATE ENTERTAINING CONTENT FOR MATERIAL THAT CAN SOMETIMES BE DULL FOR STUDENTS. FOR EXAMPLE:

- ▶ TIMELINES (HISTORY, EVENTS, SEQUENCES)
- ▶ HISTORICAL FIGURES (BACKGROUND HISTORY, LIFE OF)
- ▶ INSTRUCTIONS (STEP BY STEP, DETAILS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EASY TO FOLLOW)
- ▶ DIALOGUE, PUNCTUATION
- ▶ CHARACTER ANALYSIS
- ▶ PLOT ANALYSIS
- ▶ STORYTELLING
- ▶ PRE-WRITING TOOL
- ▶ POST-READING TOOL
- ▶ TEACHING ONOMATOPOEIA (USING LETTERING TOOL)?

HAVE STUDENTS LOOK AT HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF VISUAL NARRATIVES AND SEQUENTIAL ART, IN TAPESTRIES, FRIEZES, AND HIEROGLYPHICS. THESE RECORDINGS OF ANCIENT EVENTS USED COMMONLY RECOGNIZED SYMBOLS TO CONVEY A MESSAGE AND ESTABLISH MYTHOLOGIES.

This storyboard can serve as a formative assessment tool, particularly in a teacher-student writing conference.

With their storyboards in hand, the students are ready to create the final version of their own comics or graphic novels. If they are working on paper, print out copies of different panel layout pages that you can get from a 30-day trial version of Comic Life at plasq.com. Students draw their images or cut out and glue their photos into the panels. They create speech bubbles and lettering, cut them out and glue them on as another layer. This production method gives students a hands-on opportunity to display their artistry. School visits by comic artists like Chad Solomon, author of *Adventures of Rabbit and Bear Paws*,⁶ can inspire confidence in drawing and design.

Students can create their comics digitally if they have access to a computer lab. I began our earliest versions with Kid Pix, software licensed through

the Ministry of Education. The graphics for backgrounds and stamps lend themselves well to the comics medium. The downside is that you have to create the speech bubbles manually with the draw tool. Also, the individual drawings do not fit into a panel layout page. Connecting them with the slideshow feature creates something more like a cartoon than a comic.

I've found that Comic Life is just the right software. The wide range of panel choices, layouts, lettering, and speech bubbles opens up the graphic possibilities. It is a great forum to set free students' creativity and critical thinking. If possible, at this point of the unit I would recommend sending the students to the computer to upload their photos and write their stories in Comic Life. ♥

NOTES

1. Charles Thacker, "How to Use Comic Life in the Classroom." MacInstruct TechEd, Technology in Education, macinstruct.com/node/69.
2. Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practice of the World's Most Popular Art Form*. Paramus, NJ: Poorhouse Press, 1985.
3. For explanations of these and other terms common to the genre, see Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: the Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.
4. McCloud, p.
5. Lesson design adapted and used with permission of Jack Hammond, teacher, Stouffville District Secondary School, York Region District School Board.
6. Chad Solomon and Christopher Meyer, *Adventures of Rabbit and Bear Paws, The Sugar Bush*. Edmonton: Lone Pine Publishing, 2006. Available at lonepinepublishing.com.
7. Thacker, "How to Use Comic Life in the Classroom."



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The Power of Global Collaborative Learning



Photo: Jim Carleton

■ by **Mali Bickley**

Juliette, Kiera, and Michelle, 11-year-old students from Barrie, are online asking their new friend Rawa what it is like to live in Iraq. Michelle asks, “What is it like knowing that there is war so near to you? Are you able to go outside to play without being scared?” Three days later Rawa replies, “I live in a safe situation, but I consider that I live with those children that can’t go out to play and do what they like because they are in my country and we are all the same.”

Mali Bickley is a literacy coach with the Simcoe County District School Board. Contact her by email at mbickley@scdsb.on.ca

These students are participating in Machinto, a global collaborative project supported by iEARN: the International Education and Resource Network. (iearn.org). iEarn is a nonprofit, international organization that includes over 20,000 school and youth organizations in over 115 countries and more than one million teachers and students who work together online.

Global collaborative learning uses technology as a tool to build relationships by collaborating, communicating, and sharing with others throughout the world. Students are not just using the computer to do the same activity they might do without a computer. They work on meaningful tasks and solve problems together, learning about different perspectives from their peers, thinking critically as a result of reality-based learning and questioning. What better way to learn about war, natural disasters, child soldiers, and segregated education than from the students affected?

Projects that are rooted in a collaborative framework prepare our students to become liter-



ate and responsible members of the global community. Research indicates that the jobs that will be available for the students in today's classrooms do not yet exist, but we do know that they will involve working with technology to communicate and collaborate with others throughout the world. Students are growing up in a world where these tools are part of everyday life. As teachers, we can provide the opportunity for our students to use these skills and tools to collaborate with others and encourage their participation in the global learning community.

For the first time in history, students and teachers can provide feedback to their global partners by using wikis, blogs, forums, socially responsible social-networking tools, such as Taking It Global (takingitglobal.org), and other tools. Peer-to-peer feedback can be more meaningful to students than traditional editing, in which the teacher provides the feedback. In many situations, the students become the project leaders and facilitators and the teachers become learners.

Teachers involved in global collective learning constantly hear from students that they want to produce their very best work because they know it will be seen by the world. Even students who have never before written a final piece of work produce high-quality work. Knowing that it will be part of a worldwide project and being able to share their work motivates many reluctant writers.

Global learning projects can be integrated into all areas of the Ontario curriculum; they are not additions to an already full teacher load. For example, the Japanese picture book *Machinto* is the basis for a project in which students learn about how war affects children their own age. They read other books on a similar theme, such as *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* and *Peace Crane*, and are encouraged to make text-to-text connections. They create a picture book with the theme of peace and friendship, which is then posted on the Machinto website, machinto.org. Hard copies of the books are sent as gifts of friendship to children in areas of the world affected by war.

The Art Miles project (art-miles-project.org) pairs students in two classrooms who learn about specific aspects of each other's countries. For example a grade 3/4 class in Innisfil, Ontario was paired with a class in



Photos: Malli Hickey



Japan. Their specific task was to teach each other about festivals and fairy tales in their culture. The classes exchanged welcome packages to introduce their community: the Innisfil class sent Canadian flags, maps, hockey cards, maple syrup, a sweater, and a variety of Canadian stories, such as the *Paper Bag Princess* and *The Very Last First Time*, by Robert Munsch. In turn, we received origami paper, Japanese cartoons and games, and a wonderful collection of fairy tales.

Each class also prepared a short video showing their school and community. The final task was to paint a 60-square-foot mural to show what each class learned about the cultural fairy tales. On their half of the mural the Japanese students painted a scene from *The Paper Bag Princess* and the Ontario class painted a scene from the Japanese tale *Little Fingerling* on the other half.

This mural will be on display in Innisfil before it goes back to Japan to be part of the students' graduation ceremony. It will then become part of a travelling art exhibition displayed at the annual iEARN international conference in Uzbekistan, at major art galleries throughout the world, and finally, along with 1500 similar murals, at the Great Pyramids in Egypt to celebrate the end of the UNESCO Decade of Peace in 2010.

The learning that resulted from this project extended far beyond reading and writing fairy tales, as students learned about each other, their schools, communities, and cultures.

My Hero (myhero.com) creates formal global learning circles that include six to eight classes from countries worldwide, coordinated by a project facilitator. Students research and write about someone in their own lives who is a hero. The project provides a structured writing tool that enables each student to produce a piece of writing and to include pictures, web links, bibliographies, and quotations. (The tools can be seen at myhero.com>Create.) At the end of the project, each class has a professional-looking web page featuring students' stories.

Students can also produce a short film about their hero. Several grade 4 students from W. H. Day Elementary School in Bradford wrote, filmed, and edited a short film about their hero, Mohamed Sidibay, a former child soldier from Sierra Leone whom they had supported and communicated with for several years. They submitted the film to a national multimedia

competition and won first place for the elementary school category. Projects like these allow students to work at their own level and the teacher to assess their individual learning.

Taking It Global also has collaborative tools that allow several classes to work together, investigate a global issue, and post student work using the collaborative classroom space at takingitglobal.org/tiged.

Students benefit hugely from participating in these projects. They develop a better understanding of global issues while increasing their appreciation and understanding of other cultures. As Juliette from Barrie commented after talking to her friend in Iraq: "It is important that we get to know others around the world and learn from each other. It is interesting to learn with students from other countries. We can study the same things, even though we are in different parts of the world. That is the way we are going to make the world a better and peaceful place, by really talking and working together." ♥



Photos: Mall Bickley

Portable Radio: Podcasting from the



■ by Jane Smith and Nathan Toft

Photos: Brigitte Bouvier, CP Images

Portables

In the summer of 2006 Nathan Toft downloaded Apple's iTunes software, curious about the 99-cent songs he had heard about. This move introduced him to the exciting world of podcasting. He quickly got Jane hooked and the two teachers, who are both joggers, loaded up their iPods with a variety of shows they downloaded from the Internet. This was the start of their podcasting adventure.



We have been team teaching Junior grades for the past five years. We share a similar interest in technology and its application in the classroom. This year, we are each teaching a 5/6 class, and we plan our units together and combine our classes whenever possible. We both maintain class websites and blogs and collaborate on the *portableradio.ca* website. We also act as “computer contact teachers” in our school, assisting staff with all things technological. Being teachers as well as techies, we surfed the Net and found two podcasts in particular, *Room 208* and *Radio WillowWeb*, that we were eager to introduce to our students.

What is Portable Radio?

Portable Radio (*portableradio.edublogs.org*) is a podcast made by our two grade 5/6 classes at A. Lorne Cassidy Elementary School, just outside Ottawa. We named the show *Portable Radio* because our classes are housed in portable classrooms and podcasts are played on portable MP3 players. Of course, podcasts like ours can also be listened to directly on any computer with Internet access.

Our classes produce a podcast about every two weeks. Each podcast is about 15 minutes long and showcases both what's going on in class and what our students are interested in. It's like having our own variety show that gives our students the opportunity to interview people, make radio dramas, read their stories, and provide audio highlights of our field trips. The shows are a way of giving our families and friends a window into our classrooms. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins can listen to us anywhere in the world. But not only friends and family can visit Portable Radio.

Through our podcast we have made contact with children and classes in other parts of Canada, the United States, England, Wales, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. Our students have come to realize that they are an integral part of a global community of learners.

Our first season

Listening to early episodes from our first season has reminded us how far we have come. It was a season of trial and error. We experimented with variety of microphone setups only to discover that there is a great deal of technique involved not only in speaking into a microphone but in holding it as well. Students tended to fidget with the mikes, causing lots of noise in the recording. We eventually discovered that it was easier to have students use voice recorders, a device that resembles a cellphone and is often used to take dictation or record lectures. Our students found it much easier to work with these devices and, as an added bonus, it freed them from their computers. They could now record themselves in the hallway, on field trips, in the gym for an assembly, or wherever they happened to be.

While we were figuring out the ins and outs of classroom podcasting we were also working on a book for Scholastic on the topic of podcasting, which was to be part of the company's "Moving Up with Literacy Place" series and used as a



grade 4 guided-reading text. As neither of us had written a book before, this was another learning experience. The book, *Our Class Podcast*, was published in early 2008 and we are thrilled with the results. You can find ordering information by clicking on "Our Book" at portableradio.edublogs.org.

Our second season

Season two of Portable Radio has already been marked by a number of highlights and accomplishments.

This year, we decided to add a mini-podcast called "Portable Radio Point of View." The idea is to take a current events story that is relevant to our students and is being covered by the local media. The students then research, summarize, and





express their opinion of the story. For example, a few of our students did a piece about Winnipeg's claim that it had the world's longest skateway. Our students, being from Ottawa, disagreed; they researched the facts and gave their opinions.

To make this experience even more meaningful, we simulated a news-gathering environment and put the students on a very tight deadline: the story had to be scripted, recorded, edited, and uploaded to the Internet within one or two days.

When our "Point of View" is completed, we email local media outlets that we think might be interested in airing it. We have been fortunate to have had four of our episodes aired on CBC Radio's *Ottawa Morning*. Plans are underway

for a reporter from their show to visit us. We've also been invited for a tour of the CBC studios.

Convinced that podcasting was something more teachers should try, we sent in a proposal to the Ministry of Education's "Teacher Learning and Leadership Program." We plan to work with a group of teachers and guide them in developing their own classroom podcasts. It is gratifying to hear that our proposal has been accepted.

Portable Radio has been quite an adventure for us and our students. We are amazed by the fact that we have had visits from over 430 cities in 44 countries. Our students' voices must be really loud for them to be heard by so many places around the world! ♥





A Tradition of Excellence

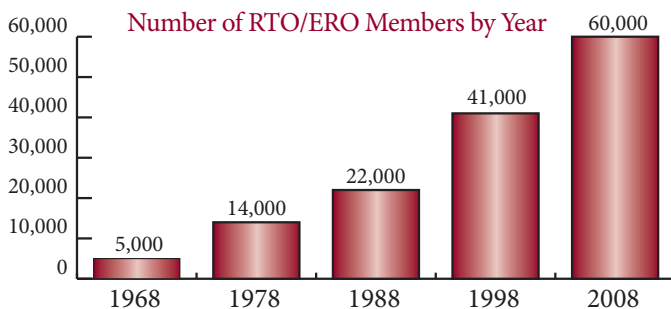


For the past 40 years, The Retired Teachers of Ontario/les enseignantes et enseignants retraités de l'Ontario (RTO/ERO) has provided quality programs and services for retired members of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and other retired educators including principals and vice-principals and educational support staff. These include:

- ✓ Comprehensive, Competitive and Affordable Health & Insurance Plans, Owned and Managed by its Members
- ✓ Unwavering Pension Support
- ✓ Successful Political Advocacy
- ✓ Award-Winning Publications
- ✓ Quality Bilingual Services
- ✓ Specialized Travel Programs
- ✓ Entertaining Social & Recreational Activities at Local District Level

Since 1968, RTO/ERO has become the official voice and lead organization for retired teachers in the province of Ontario. It has amassed the largest retiree educator health and insurance plan in Canada and the favoured choice of retired Ontario teachers with 40,000 participants.

Be part of an organization that's Moving in the Right Direction...



Join RTO/ERO and ensure your benefits in retirement will be
Here for you Now...Here for your Future.

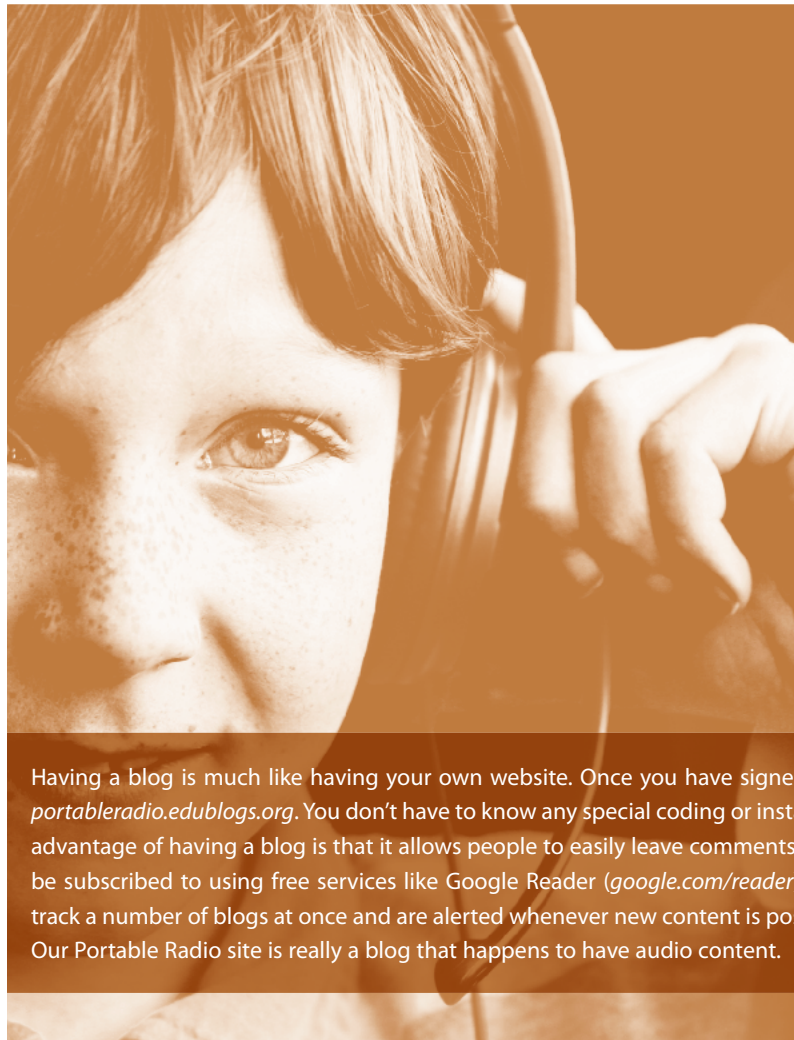
So You Want to Start Up Your Own Class Podcast?

Why a class podcast?

Podcasting is one way for students to become producers of content for the Internet and not simply consumers. Having a real audience that responds to what students have to say increases their motivation to read, write, speak, and listen critically. It teaches students to be accountable for their ideas and opinions. And it's a great deal of fun!

PortablePD.ca

As part of our "Teacher Learning and Leadership Program," we have created a new blog/podcast called *PortablePD.ca* (PortablePD.edublogs.org). It is intended to be a place for teachers to ask questions, give advice, and share success stories about their experiences with podcasting and other classroom technologies. We encourage everyone to visit the site and leave comments.



Creating your first podcast

1. Do your research. Listen to as many podcasts as you can. *Portable Radio* is a great place to start and we provide links to other podcasts there as well.
2. Hook up a microphone to your computer (think cheap at this stage – microphones can often be found in dollar stores). Record some audio. Get some practice working with audio editing programs. Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net) is a free download and works very well.

Once you feel comfortable enough with the software get your students to do some recording. Think small. Two to five minutes is a great way to test the waters and figure out what works for you and your students.

3. Give your podcast a memorable name. Sign up for a blog. We use free blogs offered at edublogs.org. The blog is a convenient way for people to find, listen to, and comment on your podcast.
4. Using your blog, post a description of what is going on in your first episode. Scroll down a little further to see a section that allows you to upload your audio MP3 file. After you have uploaded, click "send to editor."

Congratulations! You now have an official podcast that can be accessed by anyone in the world with an Internet connection. Start advertising your podcast's web address: send newsletters to parents, get a link to your podcast added to your school's website, mention it in your emails – do whatever it takes to get the word out.

Having a blog is much like having your own website. Once you have signed up, you will be given a web address. Ours is www.portableradio.edublogs.org. You don't have to know any special coding or install software on your computer. It's all done online. The advantage of having a blog is that it allows people to easily leave comments about what they see or hear. Furthermore, blogs can be subscribed to using free services like Google Reader (google.com/reader) and Bloglines (bloglines.com). That way, people can track a number of blogs at once and are alerted whenever new content is posted without having to individually visit each address. Our Portable Radio site is really a blog that happens to have audio content.



Photos: Rick Matthews

Music and Make Believe

The key role of the arts in literacy instruction

■ by Jim Giles

“We will never obtain the high results in literacy that we are seeking in Ontario until strong arts programs and teaching are in place in elementary schools.” Bob Barton, a teacher and language consultant for more than 30 years, shared this view at a drama workshop for teachers taking their drama additional qualification course. It is a concern we have heard for many years from other leading educators like David Booth, Kathy Lundy, and Larry Swartz.

Many people still consider the arts a luxury or frill, a source of amusement, or a leisure activity. Some policy makers believe the arts divert attention and resources from other subject areas that prepare students for the competitive workplace and high-paying jobs. Having never experienced a high-quality arts program, they have no point of reference and don’t understand the benefits of strong arts programs for student learning.

Educational research overwhelmingly shows arts education makes kids smarter. By hiring full-time music teachers or setting up fully equipped visual arts rooms, educational leaders are promoting literacy learning. But many do not make the connection. With the rigid and narrow focus on literacy and numeracy that has existed in schools over the past few years, many teachers are left with the misperception that there are only a few strategies for teaching curriculum expectations. Ironically though, the arts are often used to showcase our schools’ major accomplishments. Attend any school open house and you will encounter the arts in the form of choir or band concerts, plays, dance performances, or hallways and classrooms decorated with paintings and artwork.

Having strong arts instruction and experiences in our elementary schools will not only improve literacy scores, it will ultimately resurrect students’ enthusiasm for reading, writing, and literacy activities, which has been so lacking in our schools of late. Interest and engagement are key factors to high academic achievement. Educational expert Alfie Kohn stresses that “where interest appears, achievement usually follows . . . interest drives competence.”¹

Every individual has his or her own way of learning and thinking. Because the arts draw on a variety of intelligences, they can help students learn in most subject areas, as well as increase the capacity to think critically, creatively, and imaginatively. Research into brain functioning increasingly supports arts education as a way for students to develop capacities for

Jim Giles is an executive staff member in ETFO’s Professional Services department.



these higher-level skills. An education enriched by the arts can

- improve cognition
- further social development and teamwork
- stimulate personal development and self-discipline
- nurture perseverance and hard work
- prepare students to attend to multiple tasks, take risks, and capitalize on their mistakes
- teach the importance of multiple perspectives, personal interpretation, and choice.

Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner suggests that arts-based strategies be used to help students who are having difficulty in particular subject areas.² For example, if a child is having difficulty grasping a mathematical concept, the teacher could use music to develop the child's understanding. Eric Jensen, one of the world's leading interpreters of educational neuroscience, believes that "the arts are not only fundamental to success in our demanding, highly technical, fast-moving world, but they are what make us most human, most complete as people."³

In support of arts education, ETFO has developed a practical book for Junior grades teachers who are new or inexperienced in arts education. *ETFO Arts* introduces all the elements of dance, drama, music, and visual arts and shows educators how to use the arts to support literacy and other subjects.

Thanks to funding received from the Ministry of Education to support professional development, a dynamic four-part arts series was offered

this year in 10 ETFO locals to show teachers how *ETFO Arts* can be used in a classroom. Each of those locals identified an arts educator who then received training during the summer with the *ETFO Arts* writers Bonnie Anthony, Carol MacKenzie, Jane Wamsley, and Jennifer Zeitz.

Teachers who took part said they appreciated the opportunity to enrich their teaching and improve their understanding. "I am impressed that ETFO has realized a much-needed support document for teachers who are not specialists," wrote one participant in Rainy River. "Now, I have more knowledge about arts subjects."

Kevin Merkely, a curriculum consultant for the York Region District School Board, highlighted the practical applications of the resource in a recent review published in the Ontario Music Educators' Association journal, *The Recorder*:

Although *ETFO Arts* is targeted for the junior teacher, this resource would be a welcome addition to the collection of any elementary teacher. Many of the activities illustrated in this resource could be easily adapted and modified for the primary and intermediate classroom. The format of the content for all of the arts is consistent and well organized. Any classroom teacher that teaches the arts will find the elements description and the student activities very helpful. Not only would this resource be invaluable to classroom teachers, it would be a great addition to the professional library of elementary music specialists.

To obtain your copy of *ETFO Arts*, visit the ETFO website, etfo.ca and click on *shopETFO*.

The Summer Arts Academy for specialist and experienced arts teachers will be offered again this year, as part of ETFO's 2008 Summer Academy. ♡

NOTES

1. Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, p. 128.
2. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books, 1993.
3. Eric Jensen. *Arts with the Brain in Mind*, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001, p. vii.

An Environmental Tale



■ by **Andrea Hertach**

When a former student came to me with an idea to make an impact on the environment I jumped at the chance.

As a grade 6 teacher, I had an eager group of students who were waiting for their next acting job. It was February and we had performed Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to appreciative fans and family in December. This was a group of children who had an improv background and had learned to express themselves using drama in my classroom.



Zach Wilkins, who was in my grade 6 class the year before, brought me a script that he had co-written with his mother the previous summer. I read it. I could best describe *An Environmental Tale* as Dickens meets the environment. The main character, Mr. D. Stroy, is a nasty developer who is destroying the environment around Lake Simcoe for his own profit. He is visited by three ghosts who try to convince him that he needs to change his ways or bad things will happen to him and the community. Sound familiar? The script detailed Mr. Stroy's Scrooge-like journey into discovering that the environment is worth protecting and that he can make a difference.

At Lakeside Public School in Keswick, we have developed a new arts-module plan for the Intermediate students to help keep them engaged and committed to their learning. Each student is required to make selections in music, drama and dance, visual arts, and physical education choices they would enjoy in order to meet the requirements of the arts curriculum. We offer everything from mountain biking, instrumental band, woodworking, fashion design, cooking classes, and several other choices.

I went to the principal with Zach's script and asked if Zach could direct and produce it in the form of a movie in order to meet his drama-module requirement. My grade 6 students would be the actors and crew and I would mentor the whole project. Our principal, Tony Lorbetskie, really likes to think outside the box. He was all for it.

We began script reading the next week. We cast the parts easily because I was already very familiar with each of my students' strengths. We set up a shooting schedule, made committees to design sets and gather costumes, and began rehearsing. We also managed to get another Intermediate student on board, Christina Logan (also a former student), to assist with production design. This is a wonderful way to bridge the Intermediate and Junior divisions, and to promote unity and a team mentality often lacking between the divisions.

After a few weeks (periods 1 and 2 each morning), we finished filming all the scenes. The post-production work was completed by Zach throughout March and April, as he combined music, visual presentation, and dramatic content to make a powerful statement on how we can all work together to save the planet.

I arranged newspaper coverage by the *Georgina Advocate*. A reporter came to the school, photographed the students, and wrote down their names for a story about our movie premiere on May 9, 2007 at the Gem Theatre in Keswick.

Can you imagine the children's excitement as their families and friends gathered at the theatre and *An Environmental Tale* was written up on the marquee? Even the mayor, Robert Grossi, attended our premiere. Zach had written him a letter a few weeks earlier, telling him about our project and how we hoped to make a difference to the community. Our principal and vice-principal, Cheryl Daniel, gave us their valued support by being there too.

We were all elated. The students felt like stars. The project was a success on a number of levels: we used media as a teaching and learning tool that gave students writing, directing, producing, designing, and acting experience; we had a strong environmental message that we felt very passionate about; and we involved the community in a powerful way.

Our next steps include using the movie to educate a larger community of people to make environmental changes. We want green bins in the schools to reduce garbage further. Who knows what else we'll achieve? When you get a creative group of students, parents, and teachers together the sky's the limit! ♥



Photos: Andrea Hertach

Andrea Hertach is a teacher with the York Region District School Board.

Insured Benefits: A Crucial Part of Compensation

■ by Jim McMahon

Since ETFO's inception in 1998, strong collective bargaining has worked to equalize compensation and working conditions for teacher and occasional teacher members across the province. Such items as A4 salary maximums, preparation time, supervision time, instructional time, lunch breaks, and the voluntary nature of extracurricular activities have been standardized in all ETFO collective agreements.

The 2008 bargaining goals for teachers and occasional teachers continue to focus on improvements for all of our members in many of these areas.

Disparity in insured benefits

For a variety of reasons, the exception to this standardization of pay and working conditions has been in the area of insured benefits. The benefit plans in both our teacher and occasional teacher locals differ widely in the share of premiums that members pay and the actual benefit coverage provided, creating a differential in how members across the province are compensated.

The gap in compensation

The disparity occurs in two ways. The first has to do with the share of premiums paid by the employer and employee. In many teacher locals, 100 percent of the premium for benefit plans is paid by the employer; teachers pay nothing. However, in other teacher locals, the employer pays less, sometimes as little as 79 percent of the cost of premiums. The teachers' share at 21 percent amounts to approximately \$1100 gross for a family benefit plan. Consequently, the real

compensation for these teachers is substantially lower than that of their colleagues.

Similarly, in occasional teacher locals, the way premium costs are shared between employer and employees varies widely, with employers paying 75 percent in some locals and nothing at all in others. This results in an approximate \$3000 difference in the cost of a family plan. The fact that some employers pay nothing makes these benefits prohibitively expensive for our members.

The second factor that leads to a gap in compensation for members is the level of benefits provided by the plans. Again, there is a substantial difference between locals both in services provided and in the cost of individual benefits. Anything not covered by a benefit plan becomes a user fee, dollars that come directly out of a member's pocket. Examples include benefit plans that do not include travel insurance or orthodontic or restorative dental coverage, so that members must assume the full cost or purchase their own coverage.

Jim McMahon is an executive staff member in ETFO's Protective Services department.

There are numerous other instances of user fees throughout the teacher and occasional teacher benefit plans, and the effect on our members is the same: they cost our members money. Until these financial issues regarding benefits have been addressed, real compensation for our members across the province will not have been equalized.

Collective bargaining history

The history of the collective bargaining as it relates to benefits is instructive. With some exceptions, the benefit plans in existence in 2008 were largely negotiated in the 1980s. Attacks on benefit plans began in 1993 with the NDP's Expenditure Control Plan, followed by the Social Contract, followed by the cuts made by the Conservatives under Mike Harris, and the amalgamation of the school boards in 1998.

These attacks on funding all made the assumption that benefit plans were not a legitimate part of teacher compensation and, at any rate, were too costly and had to be cut.

The role of school boards

During this period, some school boards recognized that benefit plans were legitimate components of collective agreements and did not attempt to decimate them. Other boards however, began a ceaseless attack on benefits that in some cases continues today. The blueprint for these attacks was a 1992 memo from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) that gave boards a laundry list of ways in which to shrink benefit plans.

During the 1990s, many locals were unable to resist the assault on their benefit plans during collective bargaining. This resulted in the employer "cherry-picking" plans; in other words, employees paid more for premiums and received fewer benefits. In many locals this situation still exists.

Negotiations in 2008

In the last round of bargaining, ETFO put a stop to the stripping of benefits and bargained improvements in all teacher and many occasional teacher collective agreements. The same steadfast approach will be the basis of negotiations this year. Bargaining will address the compensation gap caused by the differences in benefit plans.

It will not be easy. The OPSBA is continuing to discuss "cost containment," which means benefit strips. The Liberal government has not, as yet, addressed the underfunding of benefits that has existed since the Harris years. This is a major obstacle, but with strong member commitment and perseverance, ETFO will realize success.

It is crucial that ETFO members realize that benefit plans are an integral part of their compensation package and a major component of improving their and their families' financial futures. **V**



Imagine...

Moving to a new country...

Having to re-establish yourself as a teacher...

Having to learn about a new education system...

Host a Newcomer!

Model the role of an Ontario teacher for an internationally educated teacher...

Provide an opportunity for an internationally educated teacher to observe an experienced Ontario teacher in action. There are no evaluation expectations of the classroom teacher. Simply welcome the internationally educated teacher for a two-day visit to your classroom.

For more information about this opportunity, contact the Project Manager:

Carol Norton-Sargent, 416-961-8800 ext. 420,
1-888-534-2222, ext. 420,
cnortonsargent@teachinontario.ca

Coach a Newcomer!

Help open a classroom door for an internationally educated teacher...

Volunteer to provide guidance and support to a newcomer teacher for four hours a month over a period of six months through meetings, e-mail and phone calls. Share knowledge of the classroom dynamic and the role of the teacher in Ontario.

For more information about this coaching opportunity, contact:

In Ottawa: Haley Maunder, LASI World Skills
613-233-0453, ext. 365,
haley@ottawa-worldskills.org

In Toronto: Lourdes Zelaya, Skills for Change
416-658-3101, ext. 239,
zelaya@skillsforchange.org

In Windsor: Kelly Todd, Windsor Women Working With Immigrant Women, 519-973-5588, ext. 23
kelly@www.wiw.org



TEACH IN ONTARIO

Help for internationally educated teachers

Funded by the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada through Citizenship and Immigration Canada

LTD Buyout – Take It or Leave It?

■ *by* Professional Relations Services staff

From time to time, an ETFO member on long-term disability will be approached by the insurance company with an offer of a one-time lump sum payment in settlement of her or his ongoing claim for monthly LTD benefits. This may seem like an enticing offer, and you may want to leap at the chance, but before you do there are some issues to consider.

Some members may decide in favour of a lump sum settlement because it

- brings finality and closure
- ends periodic reviews of the claim by the insurer
- eliminates any risk of termination of the claim
- eliminates the risk that the insurer will decide you are well enough to return to work or participate in a rehabilitation program despite what your doctors say
- eliminates the possibility of having to attend an independent medical evaluation arranged by the insurer
- eliminates the risk that the insurer will take issue with your treatment decisions and question whether you are receiving regular and customary care.

Whether a lump sum settlement is in your best interests will depend on your own personal circumstances, including your financial needs and opportunities as a whole.

Your personal health status is the most important consideration in making this decision. You

should consult your doctors and/or specialists to ensure that you have as good a sense of your medical prognosis as possible before considering an offer from the insurer.

A lump sum amount generally provides for some payment into the future. If there is a chance that you will recover to the point of being able to return to gainful employment, there is a possibility that the settlement might exceed or at least approximate what you might otherwise receive in monthly benefits. However, if all medical information suggests that returning to gainful employment is unlikely any time before the end of the claim, then taking a lump sum settlement today means you are giving up benefits that you would otherwise receive.

You also need to take into account the impact on your pension. Under the rules of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, a teacher cannot receive pension and LTD benefits for the same time period. Similarly, under the terms of most LTD policies, monthly benefits are reduced by any pension benefits received. A lump sum settlement removes the possibility of overlap of the two claims and may open up your options for applying for pension benefits (retirement or disability). Pension benefits received after the lump sum is negotiated would not reduce or otherwise alter the settlement offer. However, it is important that your pension contributions be brought up to date before you retire.

Members have decided against accepting lump sum settlement offers for many reasons:

- A lump sum is not the full value of the claim. It is a compromise figure, less than what you would cumulatively collect if you remained on monthly benefits until the termination date.
- The amount offered may not be enough, so it may be too high a price to pay to get out from the scrutiny of the insurer.
- If you are not receiving monthly LTD benefits or if the lump sum does not include a provision for future LTD benefits, the OTPP will not consider you an active member, and you will not receive additional credit or service in the plan. Depending on your personal circumstances, this could mean a smaller pension on retirement than you would have received if you had continued to receive monthly LTD payments. If you continue to be on authorized leave from the school board, then you may be able to purchase additional service with the pension plan, but this depends on your own prior history with the pension plan.
- Many school boards continue the employment of teachers who are on approved leaves, including those receiving LTD benefits. The advantages include ongoing access to other benefit plans (for example, extended health care) and ongoing status with the pension plan board as a teacher on an authorized leave. However, when you accept a lump sum settlement your LTD claim ends and the school board may move to terminate your employment, which in turn could end your access to these other benefit plans. You should investigate this further with your local union representatives.

ETFO recommends that you consult with your own accountant or financial advisor about whether accepting a lump sum settlement is in your best interests financially. But ultimately the decision of whether to accept the insurer's offer of a lump sum settlement is your own. Be sure your decision is an informed one. **V**

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE A WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE



The Reflections on Practice Institute is a face-to-face and online community of teacher action researchers. Participants attend three sessions during a school year to learn the fundamentals of completing an action research project. A team of facilitators and collaboration in an online community of practice supports participants.

Contact Dr. Anne Rodrigue at arodrigue@etfo.ca or visit etfo.ca for further details.

PROFESSIONAL RELATIONS SERVICES staff provide confidential advice and support to assist you. They deal with a wide variety of issues: the performance appraisal process, work-related conflict, College of Teachers investigations, and human rights issues, including harassment and discrimination, professional boundaries, and allegations. Call 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836 and ask to speak to the PRS counsellor on call.

Professional learning communities as forums for critical conversations about race

■ by Sherry Ramrattan Smith



“Teaching must be further professionalized and teachers must be at the forefront of those efforts. Professional learning communities provide the means through which teachers can be enabled and emboldened to develop individually as professionals, and collectively as a profession.”¹

Approaches to social justice and equity work

The approaches we use when we pursue social justice and equity work vary and are always evolving. Sometimes they require modifications or new directions. Readjusting our approaches begins with reflection, looking inward to recognize how our attitudes, beliefs, and values are linked to our choices and actions. Whether we choose to work alone or with colleagues, we aspire to build understandings that honour the theoretical, experiential, professional, and practical knowledge(s) necessary to engage in social justice and equity work both in and outside of the classroom.

Exploring issues of race

The next time you read a newspaper or watch a televised newscast you will probably be confronted with issues relating to race or racism. For instance, the public has expressed a variety of opinions about the Toronto District School Board’s decision to create an Afrocentric alternative school. Despite the pervasiveness of stories relating to race and racism in the media, these topics are sometimes avoided in our schools. As a union, we believe our members can benefit from programs that encourage discussion and

professional learning opportunities related to issues of race.

Defining racism

Language and definitions are always evolving. In the 2006 Equity and Women’s Services report to the ETFO Annual Meeting racism is defined as a system in which one group of people exercises power over others on the basis of skin colour and racial heritage; a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, false assumptions and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one racial or ethnic group over another. Systemic racism is embedded within organizational and institutional structures and programs, as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns.

Tina Lopes and Barb Thomas, authors of *Dancing on Live Embers: Challenging Racism in Organizations*, outline three ways in which racism is manifested:

Individual racism: the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be unconscious or conscious, active or passive.

Institutional racism: the network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that

“Life stories provide a valid means of transmitting history. They allow us to draw connections between past and present, yesterday and today.”³

create advantages for white people, and discrimination, oppression and disadvantage for racialized people.

Systemic racism: the conscious or unconscious policies, procedures, and practices that exclude, marginalize, and exploit racialized people. Systemic racism is supported by institutional power and by powerful (often unexamined) ideas that make racism look normal and justified. Systemic racism allows individuals to practise racism in organizations that do not have effective complaint procedures, performance appraisals, and promotion policies that require equity competencies.²

This year ETFO created two professional learning communities as part of its commitment to build members’ capacity for social justice and equity work in their classrooms, schools, and other contexts. In the first program, participants explored issues relating to identity, white privilege, pedagogy, and how these intersect and influence practice. In the second program, participants explored the experiences of immigrant educators and their impact on the development of equity-based curriculum. Each program took place over the course of six weeks. During that time members worked individually and collaboratively to build their knowledge and skills to better understand the complexities of working within and across differences.

Participants made a commitment to read, write, and engage in conversation through face-to-face meetings and teleconferencing. They also agreed to share aspects of their learning in various formats, such as writing reports, presenting to colleagues, or liaising with community groups. Facilitators Dr. Susan Tilley and Dr. Dolana Mogadime listened to the experiences of members and built the course around the issues they brought forward. Selected readings were then used to build knowledge and understanding around key issues. Journal entries were also used as a means to connect the life stories and experiences of participants to the issues.



ETFO members are committed to taking leadership roles in social justice and equity work. Here are comments from two participants in the professional learning communities:

“I had never been challenged to, and therefore never did think about, the privileges afforded me because I was white, or whether those privileges were available to everyone. I used to think, like the majority of white Canadians, that everyone in Canada has an equal chance at success if they work hard and get a good education. I now have the tools to question that attitude. As a woman I was aware of, and had experienced to varying degrees, discrimination based on my gender. But it was the learning process of this PLC that enabled me to see the same kind of thing happening to racial minorities, and that I was a part of that problem[as a white woman] whether I was aware of it or not.”

—**Karen Chow**, Hastings & Prince Edward Occasional Teachers’ Local

“Reading the book Taking Back Control in which black teachers speak of their experiences, I found myself in 2008. Yes, we do see pictures representing diversity on various media but have we really done enough as an immigrant-based society to erase prejudice for good? There should be more of these forums for further thought-provoking dialogue and discussions between various stakeholder groups so that there are some solutions to the myriad problems being faced by immigrant teachers.”

—**Arifa Ghaffar**, Kawartha Pine Ridge Occasional Teachers’ Local

NOTES

1. M. Capers, “Epilogue: Teaching and Shared Professional Practice: A History of Resistance, A Future Dependent on Its Embrace,” in S. M. Hord (ed.), *Learning Together, Leading Together: Changing Schools Through Professional Learning Communities*. New York: Teachers’ College Press, 2004, p. 153.
2. T. Lopes and B. Thomas. *Dancing on Live Embers: Challenging Racism in Organizations*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006, p. 270.
3. J. Beecroft, C. Brown, M. Neigh, C. Pawis, S. Ramrattan Smith, and P. Wright, *The Power of Story, Volume 1*. Toronto: Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, 2002, p. 7

■ by André Charlebois

It may sound like a cliché, but technology is all around us. We find it in our homes, vehicles, workplaces, and schools and use it to ensure convenience and comfort.

Les Technologies d'information et de communication (TICs) can be useful tools to help teachers of French as a second language and their students meet the main objective of the program: communication, oral and written.



Photos: Anne de Haas

La technologie en action – Branchons-nous sur la technologie!

“Comment dit-on?”

Technology has its own vocabulary, which is not always part of everyday life situations. The following non-exhaustive French list of technological hardware and peripherals could be useful for teachers and students:

Le micro-ordinateur de bureau: le clavier, l'écran, le moniteur, la souris, le boîtier tour, les enceintes acoustiques

L'ordinateur portable : le clavier, le lecteur de CD ou de DVD, l'écran ACL, la fente pour carte PC, la fente pour carte mémoire, la clé USB

Le vidéoprojecteur, l'écran de projection, la télécommande¹

What about vocabulary related to communication, an important part of the TICs?

educational blog – *le blogue éducatif, le cybercarnet éducatif*

podcast – *le balado*

podcasting – *la baladodiffusion*

surf the Web – *naviguer dans Internet*

webcast – *la webémission²*

Les TICs dans la classe de français

As any teacher of French knows, it is of the utmost importance to plan according to the curriculum and the needs of students in a particular class. Here is an example how a video podcast could be used in the classroom, to reinforce a theme.

Saviez-vous que...?

Grade: Intermediate level (grades 7 and 8)

Program: French as a Second Language – Core, Extended, or Immersion

Theme: Famous Canadians

Activity: Un roman – *Dans la maison d'Anne ... aux pignons verts!*

Curriculum Overall Expectation: Grade 8 – French as a Second Language

Core: Listen to and talk about simple oral texts in structured and open-ended situations

Immersion: Listen and respond to a wide range of spoken texts and media works.³

André Charlebois is a retired coordinator of French programs with the Upper Canada District School Board. He is currently working as an educational consultant and as a teacher at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.



Les étapes à suivre

1. Find a class elsewhere in Canada to twin with your class. You can ask the Société éducative des visites et échanges au Canada/Society for Education Visits and Exchanges in Canada (SEVEC) sevec.ca to help you find such a twin.
2. Students videotape a conversation or a brief message to be sent to their twin class. Transmission will be faster and easier if a digital video camera is used. You may also need to obtain permission from parents or guardians to film their children.
3. The initial message may be a presentation of participants. The followup message should address the content as set out in the curriculum expectations.
4. There are many possible topics. One suggestion is to choose a celebration and describe how it is observed in your family, your school, and your community.
5. These virtual visits could lead to an actual visit between the two classes – what an enriching experience for both groups of students!

La technologie – mon alliée!

The website radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/pourlesprofs provides reliable information for students to use as they research and produce a final task to demonstrate their learning.

Technology will never replace an eloquent, friendly, smiling, inviting, and devoted French teacher. Instead, let's use this tool and make it our ally and meet the needs of all our students.

Que la techno soit votre meilleure alliée! ♥

NOTES

1. *Le français au bureau*, Sixième édition. Ste-Foy: Les publications du Québec, 2005.
2. Office québécois de la langue française – oqlf.gouv.qc.ca.
3. Ontario Ministry of Education, The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, 1998.
4. Ontario Ministry of Education, The Ontario Curriculum, Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, Revised.

Une mise en situation possible...

1. Following the study of a unit on famous Canadians, ask students to create groups of two, select a topic of interest, and seek some relevant and unique information on that topic. For example: What house in Canada is visited by the most people?
2. Ask students to integrate technology as an element of their presentation.
3. The website archives.radio-canada.ca is a useful source of pertinent and reliable information about Canadian culture. It provides webcasts and podcasts of its radio and TV broadcasts about famous Canadians.

Note: Teachers can subscribe to the weekly *Cyberlettre des Archives de Radio-Canada* or the *Cyberlettre pour les profs* by accessing the website radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/pourlesprofs. These free resources will prove very useful for you and your students.

Teachers who want their students to make fuller use of technology can create a podcast for other students to learn from. This activity can also be used as a means of sharing information with another class elsewhere in the province or in Canada. It becomes a virtual student exchange between two schools or two communities (See page 25).

Une rencontre visuelle et virtuelle

Grade: Junior or Intermediate level

Program: French as a Second Language – Core, Extended, or Immersion Social Studies, History or Geography

Curriculum Overall Expectation: Grade 5 – Social Studies

Use media works, oral presentations, written notes and descriptions, drawings, and tables to present information about processes or sequences of events⁴

Getting from Point A to Point B

■ **by Christine Brown** Every day, millions of Canadians board a plane, train, bus or subway car. Yet for people with disabilities, the lack of accessible transportation has long been a flashpoint. Leaving aside the inability to freely visit friends and family, this barrier has consistently been identified in the research literature as a key factor in the high rate of unemployment among people with disabilities.

Despite the expense and time it consumes, many individuals and advocacy groups have turned to courts and tribunals for redress. What follows is a summary of three such cases that have all been adjudicated in the past year.

In March 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada overturned an earlier Federal Court of Appeal decision and ruled that VIA Rail's purchase of \$130 million worth of inaccessible passenger rail cars was contrary to the protections afforded under applicable human rights provisions. The cars had been found, among other things, to lack accessible washrooms, appropriate wheelchair tie-downs, sufficiently wide doorways, and adequate space for service dogs. The plaintiff in this case was the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

In July 2007, disability rights champion David Lepofsky won his case against the Toronto Transit Commission. The adjudicator for the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal ruled that all stops on surface routes must now be announced for the benefit of transit patrons with visual impairments. Two years earlier, after a 10-year battle,

Mr. Lepofsky had forced the TTC to implement a system to call out the names of subway stops.

Finally, this January an important ruling was issued by the Canadian Transportation Agency. The CTA ordered that Air Canada, Air Canada Jazz, and WestJet may no longer charge additional fares for a passenger who requires the presence of a personal attendant during flight. The complaint had been brought by two individual plaintiffs, and by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

One of the more interesting aspects of this case was financial. The airlines were unable to demonstrate to the CTA that such a policy would constitute an "undue hardship." The CTA estimated that the cost of implementation would equal only 0.09 percent of Air Canada's annual passenger revenues.

In any number of successful human rights complaints, the circle of beneficiaries extends far beyond individuals with disabilities. Principles of universal design come into play in many of these cases. For example, having subway and bus stops announced assists not only individuals who are blind, but also those who are visitors or newcomers, or who are unable to read the signage, or who are simply fatigued after a long day.

The individuals and organizations that launched these fights should never have been forced to do so. Unfortunately, we have not yet reached the point at which our laws are sufficiently proactive. It is also too early to predict the effect the full implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act will have. In the meantime, we all move forward when decisions such as these are made. **v**

In any number of successful human rights complaints, the circle of beneficiaries extends far beyond individuals with disabilities.

Christine Brown is the coordinator of ETFO's Protective Services department.

Helping internationally trained teachers

by **Hilda Watkins**



Gaining access to the teaching profession can be a lengthy and somewhat challenging process. There are cyclical fluctuations that result in teacher shortages and surpluses, making it difficult at times for trained teachers to get full-time jobs.

Ontario currently has a surplus of teachers and the province is also home to many internationally educated teachers (IETs) who struggle with the College of Teachers certification process. Teach in Ontario is a project designed to help them navigate the requirements to attain Ontario credentials.

Internationally educated teachers have many skills to offer Ontario's education system. Many have extensive expertise and teaching experience in their countries of origin. They bring a wealth of cultural experience and a rich linguistic mosaic to our schools and their presence can help ensure that teaching staff reflect the diversity of the student population. Moreover, the approximately 140,000 immigrants who arrive each year include a significant number of school-age children. Teachers who have been uprooted themselves can provide a unique support system for students struggling with the process of integration into the school community.

Despite the advantages they bring to the profession, IETs often have difficulty finding jobs in Ontario's publicly funded schools. Teach in Ontario aims to help them overcome some of the obstacles. The project is a partnership of LASI World Skills, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Ontario Teachers' Federation, Skills for Change, and Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women, and it is jointly funded by the provincial and federal governments through the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.


Teach in Ontario consultation centres in

Toronto, Windsor, and Ottawa offer services that include information and counselling about certification and employment; help obtaining documents required for certification; a six-week employment preparation course; and English language upgrading courses.

Although these services have proven to be beneficial, many internationally educated teachers who complete the program still experience limited employment opportunities. According to the 2007 *Transition to Teaching Study* released by the Ontario College of Teachers, IETs most often secure jobs as daily occasional teachers. Graduates of Canadian English-language teacher education programs have an easier time getting full-time jobs, and graduates of French-language programs and those who can teach French as a second language in English-language school boards tend to be in demand.

As a result of the funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Teach in Ontario is now able to offer IETs opportunities to participate in 10-day classroom immersion placements, attend occasional teaching workshops, and work with experienced teachers who can provide support. However, securing these placements is not always easy, as many teachers are already burdened by the numerous initiatives placed on them. Also, a significant proportion of Ontario teachers are under 40 years of age and busy with family responsibilities.

If you are interested in opening your classroom to an internationally educated teacher from the Teach in Ontario project, please contact Carol Norton-Sargent at cnortonsargent@teachinontario.ca. Supporting our international colleagues is important – and rewarding.

The Teach in Ontario website offers more information. Visit teachinontario.ca or enseignerontario.ca. 

Hilda Watkins is an ETFO vice-president and is ETFO's OTF table officer.

CTF Spearheads Movement Against Video Game

■ by **Emily Noble**



An international coalition of teacher organizations has joined in an unprecedented effort to condemn bullying and cyber bullying in all its forms. The outcry by teacher organizations representing over 4 million teachers and education workers was sparked by the March 4 release of *Bully – Scholarship Edition*.

As teachers we are concerned because the Canadian-produced video game trivializes and glorifies bullying in school. While the coalition recognizes that this is only one among thousands of violent and aggressive video games on the market, this game in particular hits closer to home for teachers and students. We cannot stand idly by while *Bully – Scholarship Edition* actively promotes and profits from bullying behaviour and violence.

Canada's classrooms are diverse and complex, and games like this easily target students who are most vulnerable. *Bully – Scholarship Edition* does nothing to promote positive relationships. The coalition has the interests of all children in mind. We encourage retailers to refuse to sell this distasteful game. We urge parents to help us raise awareness and work together toward creating caring and inclusive school environments.

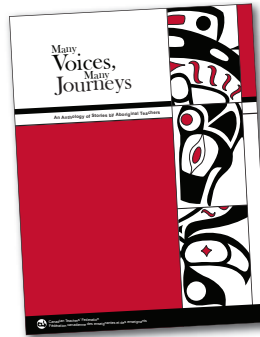
Bullying and its virtual offshoot, cyber bullying, have become key issues for the Canadian Teachers' Federation. That is why CTF spearheaded this coalition, which includes the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, National Education Association (USA), the National Union of Teachers (UK), the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association, the Australian Education Union, the Korean Federation of Teachers' Association, and the Caribbean Union of Teachers. These teacher organizations are all members of Education International, which also endorses this initiative.



Order your free "Cybertips for Teachers" brochure by emailing info@ctf-fce.ca or visiting "Cybertips for Teachers" at ctf-fce.ca.

Many Voices, Many Journeys: The voice of Aboriginal teachers

The CTF's new publication *Many Voices, Many Journeys* is an inspiring collection of stories written by Aboriginal teachers from across Canada. The collection explores the often difficult and complex journeys taken by Aboriginal educators, as well as the critical role education plays on those journeys. The idea for the book originated from the work of the CTF Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Education as a followup to its 2002 national Aboriginal Education conference.

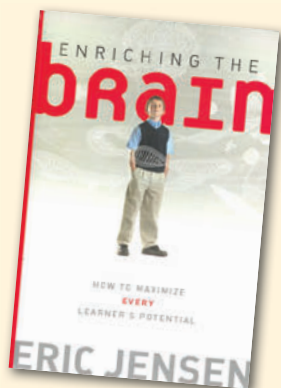


At the heart of every great teacher is a storyteller. Stories play a crucial role in Aboriginal culture as the mainstay of the Aboriginal approach to teaching and learning. The collection's artwork, poetry, and short stories touch a number of powerful themes. Not all the journeys are easy or pleasant; yet stories have the power not only to educate, but to heal. The stories also reveal the connection between education and cultural values, the necessity of preserving the language, and the ultimate bond with the land. Finally, references to the spirit world, spirituality, and mythology will light the fire of every reader's imagination.

It is a joy to publish a collection that is both educational and entertaining. We encourage everyone to embark on this wonderful journey and exploration of Aboriginal culture.

Many Voices, Many Journeys is available for purchase online at ctf-fce.ca for \$15 plus taxes and shipping. ♥

Emily Noble is president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.



Enriching the Brain: How to maximize every learner's potential

Eric Jensen
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
Books, 2006
352 pages
\$26.99 hardcover;
\$20.99 paper

Reviewed by **Rosemary Renton**

This is an optimistic book. Eric Jensen examines the educational implications of the “flexible brain paradigm,” which posits that the brain is an organ capable of change. If the brain is flexible, he reasons, then what we do as parents and teachers has the potential to physically change children’s brains for the better. And if teachers can change students’ brains, then we can enrich every single learner.

Jensen offers an overview of the traditional theories of intelligence, and provides extensive, well-researched data about the malleability of the brain. If we

agree that stress, abuse, and poor nutrition can negatively affect the brain it follows that positive influences such as exercise, nutrition, and excellent teaching can actually improve brain functioning. Jensen outlines convincing evidence that schools can have an enormous impact on students’ brains.

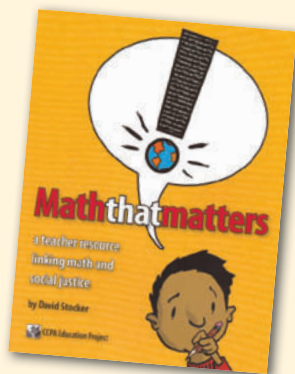
Once we accept Jensen’s premise (given his evidence, it’s hard not to), we are confronted with our enormous responsibility as “brain shapers.” Jensen offers several chapters of suggestions of things that parents and teachers can do to maximize student learning. Some of these are famil-

iar and some are new and interesting.

While implementing all of Jensen’s recommendations might seem daunting (think IEPs for every student!), he points out that if teachers “think it would be too tedious or time-consuming, you haven’t added up all the hours educators currently spend on the standards-based system and high-stakes testing.” And that, like the rest of Jensen’s book, is something to think about.

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*Rosemary Renton is a teacher librarian with the Simcoe County District School Board.*



### Math That Matters: A teacher resource for linking math and social justice

David Stocker  
Ottawa: Canadian Centre for  
Policy Alternatives, 2007  
304 pages, \$24.95

Reviewed by **Brian Harrison**

Almost every teacher every day hears students asking “Why do we

have to learn this stuff?”—especially if the teacher is leading a grade 7 or 8 math class. This partly because it is the nature of the adolescent learner to question, but it is also because keeping it safe and marketable is the dark secret of mathematics teaching resources and textbooks.

David Stocker, a Toronto-based educator, has developed a teacher resource that gives late Junior and Intermediate teachers an alternative. *Math That Matters* is part of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ Education Project, which was established in response to the organization’s growing concerns about the influence of corporations in public education. Stocker writes with a clear voice from the perspective of a classroom teacher with a strong com-

mitment to sound practice.

Stocker repudiates what he calls the “pizza party math” of current resources. He wants us to “go to the danger” and his math lessons are based on topics like homophobia, class and poverty, child abuse, racial profiling, exploitation of the environment, and workers’ rights. Each lesson offers background information that helps the classroom teacher to introduce the lesson in a developmentally appropriate way. Admittedly, many teachers will find these topics to be outside their comfort zone. Stocker acknowledges their discomfort while inviting them to “spark discussion” and “to engage students in the democratic process and increase their interest in social justice advocacy.”

The tradition of the mathematician as an agent of social change has been diminished in our current teaching culture, as has the essence and discipline of mathematical inquiry: posing, reasoning, and developing proofs in order to solve problems and explain the world in which we live. Too often, students receive math instruction based on memorizing procedures. The true value of the lessons developed by Stocker lies in the engaging contexts and in the emphasis placed on developing students’ critical thinking abilities: they are rich tasks about rich topics.

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Brian Harrison is a teacher with the York Region District School Board. A longer version of this review appeared in February-March 2008 issue of Our Times.



Double Twist Game, Set and Match

Donna King
 Boston: Houghton Mifflin/
 Kingfisher, 2007
 132 and 136 pages respectively
 \$8.95 each

Reviewed by **Paula Marengour**

Donna King's *Double Twist* and *Game, Set and Match* – part of a series of books aimed at sports-minded girls in grades 4, 5 and 6 – are a refreshing and unique change from many series books for this audience that involve horses or are mysteries.

Both books feature preadolescent girls involved in competitive sports. In *Double Twist* 12-year-old Laura Lee and her partner are training to compete in the Montreal Junior Grand Prix figure skating event. When her partner suffers an injury, Laura does not let this interfere with her dreams of winning the gold medal. She

finds a new partner, Scott, a diamond in the rough, and continues on her road to making her dream a reality.

In *Game, Set and Match* 12-year-old Carrie is a tennis player whose father wants her to be the best. Carrie feels the pressure and fakes an injury so she will no longer have to compete. Her coach and parents realize what she is doing and send her to an exclusive camp for up-and-coming tennis stars. Here Carrie makes some friends and meets a rival while rediscovering her love of the game.

Both books deal with the pressures of competitive sports,

friendships, rivalries, and determination. Both main characters realize that the enjoyment of the sport is more important than winning. Many young female athletes will be able to relate to these characters immediately.

Donna King has created an easy and exciting read for young girls in both *Double Twist* and *Game, Set and Match*. For girls interested in sports these books will be a surefire hit.

www

Paula Marengour is a teacher librarian with the Simcoe County District School Board.



The Tia Anita Project

[audio CD]

Produced by the Tia Anita Project
 Toronto, 2007
 \$20. Available at tiaanitaproject.ca and smallworldmusic.com

Reviewed by **Catherine West**

"Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home/Your house is on fire, your children alone." The old children's rhyme is the inspiration for the name of the *Tia Anita*

Project, the creation of a group that has come together to use music to fight the firestorm of AIDS in Africa. The performing groups are a cross-section of distinguished Canadian musicians who have donated their music to this compilation. Proceeds go to the Stephen Lewis Foundation to help African children orphaned by AIDS.

This recording fills a real need in providing excellent Canadian performances of music in a wealth of world music styles that feature both instrumentals and vocals. The ladybug flies on a musical journey of 16 tracks, including selections from Colombia, Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia, and China. The notes suggest that this is "music for clapping, dancing, rocking, tapping and

bouncing along to," in various teaching environments. Students will enjoy listening and responding to these engaging recordings, which have been chosen with a view to providing opportunities for children to hear and identify various styles, instruments, and elements of music. Many of the tracks are lively, but the last four provide calming music for reflection or transition.

The Tia Anita Project hopes to post support materials such as lyrics and teaching suggestions on the website in the near future, and is encouraging teachers to contribute ideas. Early childhood educator Anne Stadlmair suggests using the music for creative movement (sometimes with scarves), for rhythm training using body percussion or small

instruments such as sticks, or for inspiring dramatic movement (the students pretend to be ladybugs, snakes, and lions).

Websites are provided for each of the performing groups, a useful resource for teachers who would like to use the CD as the basis of a student research project. Playing one track a day over the PA system and tying it to a student-developed quiz would be an engaging way to raise student awareness of world music and Canadian performers.

www

Catherine West is teacher with the Toronto District School Board and director of Orff teacher training for the Royal Conservatory of Music.



Teachers' Trivia

■ by Peter Harrison

Don't Panic . . .

I have mislaid a piece of paper on which I had jotted down three important five digit ETFO membership numbers.

Between them, I recall, the numbers use all the digits from 1 to 9.

The first number is the largest, the second is the reverse of the first, while the third is both the difference of the first two and also a perfect power – a square or cube or higher – but I can't remember which.

I need to contact the members whose numbers are second and third on the list.

What are those numbers?

.....
Send your answer to ETFOVoice@etfo.org with the word "Trivia" in the subject line. You may also mail your entry to Editor, ETFO Voice, at the address on the masthead. Three winners will be drawn from all the correct entries received by May 23, 2008.

Solution to our last puzzle "The Tryingle"

98
52 46
32 20 26
21 11 9 17
14 7 4 5 12
8 6 1 3 2 10

Winners are chosen by lottery from all the correct answers received. (More than one answer was possible.) They are:

Christine Kutenkeuler, Hamilton Wentworth
Megan Steinman, Waterloo
Anthony Johnson, Toronto

Congratulations!

Work as a teacher in the U.S.A.


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Patricia Hoag

Prince Charles Public School

Ruth Huxtable

Prince Andrew Public School

Howard Ironside

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Lynn Verner

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Ann Vieira

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Additional winners:

Tom Adams, St. Francis Catholic School

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Cynthia Arcato, Carleton Village Jr. & Sr. School

Jaime Asselin, St. Monica Catholic School

Craig Barton, James S. Bell Jr. Middle School

Karine Belhache, Marie Curie School

Sarah Chiarappa, McGillivray Central School

Kristen Fennell, Terry Fox Elementary School

Lisa Gammie, St. Peter Secondary School

Joanne Giovanatti, St. John de Brebeuf

Annie Gojmerac, St. Elizabeth Seton

John Graber, Westwood Elementary School

Barb Hacking, Avon Public School

Daniella Iannicello, Holy Family Catholic School

Nicole Jaeger, Marie Curie School

Lori James, St. Joseph School

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Peter Luu, Shaw Public School

Diana Macedo, Lanor J M School

Gerard Masse, St. Valentine Catholic School

Tina Mohr-Allen, St. Catherine of Siena

Carrie More, Amherstburg Public School

Michelle Petker-Lawrie, McGregor Public School

Paola Pezzutto-Levac, St. Patrick Catholic School

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Lillian Rota, Harwich Raleigh Public School

Corinne Scarfo, Hyde Park Public School

Connie Shearer, Iroquois Public School

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