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Greetings from the Seven Oaks Teachers Association

Once again the Seven Oaks teaching community brings together another edition of *Teaching Today for Tomorrow*. We all know that it is easy to close the door to our classrooms and offices and focus on “our” kids. The work we do to try and meet all their needs is challenging and very demanding. The articles in this edition demonstrate the willingness of the teachers of Seven Oaks to open their doors to each other. Sharing our practice, our research, and our questions enables each of us to meet the challenges of our duties with renewed strength and enthusiasm.

We encourage you to take the opportunity your colleagues have provided for you. We invite you to walk through the doors they have taken the time to open.

Orah Moss and Rob Holmes

(Co-chairs: Professional Issues, Seven Oaks Teachers Association)

Editors' Page

This issue of *Teaching Today for Tomorrow* opens with Eleanor Duckworth's article "A Reality to Which Each Belongs." Dewey coined this phrase and Duckworth uses it here to refer to curricular experiences that have the power to engage children in thinking about things that scientists, mathematicians, artists, poets, and historians love. Eleanor Duckworth describes how teaching and learning is transacted within experiences that make the cultural practices and understandings of the adult world accessible to children. All the articles in this issue address this theme.

In "Connecting the Arts to All Areas of the Curriculum" and "Letting the Musician Out to Play with the Teacher" Pat Stefanchuk and Lori Hoppenheit show us how a rich variety of authentic experiences with artistic expression allow children and teachers to form a community of learners. These two articles speak to each other. Pat Stefanchuk explores how her educational leadership at Margaret Park School meant recognizing and supporting teachers' creative and imaginative engagement with children. Her narrative describes the artistic, creative and intellectual powers of children and educators at play within a space that she helped to prepare. Lori Hoppenheit, a classroom teacher, describes the same events from her perspective. Her narrative is spontaneous, personal, and thoughtful and shows us a teacher bringing her artistic talents to school.

Beth Heimbecker and Pat Plohman explore how teaching children about empathy and helping them act in morally sensitive and ethical ways can become a meaningful school-wide project.

In "Putting the 'Piece' into Perspective," Nan Fewchuk narrates an experience which she uses to rethink and to affirm her commitment to allowing students to take playful risks in high school drama.

Bette Bowman describes how her extensive classroom library invites children into the world of the literature. Her commitment to reading with children and to helping them explore the outside world through the lens of the written text is a passion that over time developed into a coherent educational practice. In her contribution to this issue she retraces this journey.

Matthias Meiers (on behalf of the editorial committee)

A REALITY TO WHICH EACH BELONGS

Eleanor Duckworth
Professor of Education, Harvard University

The fundamental factors in the educative process are an immature, undeveloped being; and certain social aims, meanings, values incarnate in the matured experience of the adult.... It is easier to see the conditions of their separateness, to insist upon one at the expense of the other, to make antagonists of them, than to discover a reality to which each belongs (1956, p.3).

This is Dewey, in *The Child and the Curriculum*. He goes on to say,

There is no sheer self-activity possible – because all activity takes place in a medium, in a situation, and with reference to its conditions. But again, no such thing as an imposition of truth from without...is possible. All depends upon the activity which the mind itself undergoes in responding to what is presented from without (Ibid, p.30, 31).

So how do we present material "from without" so that the activity that "the mind itself undergoes" is valuable? That is the challenge of making curriculum.

During the week-long conference in 1962 that launched the curriculum development program known as the Elementary Science Study, various people had ideas about how curriculum should be organized: around ecology – conserving the resources of the planet; around physics, the foundation of all the sciences; around the developmental psychology of children's thinking; around astronomy or some other discipline. Each of these organizing frameworks seemed fine; none seemed compelling.

After that week of discussion, with no agreement reached as to an organizing frame, teams went to work – in laboratories and with children. And then the curriculum started. Not grand ideas, but looking for pieces that worked – pieces that engaged children in thinking about things that the scientists loved.

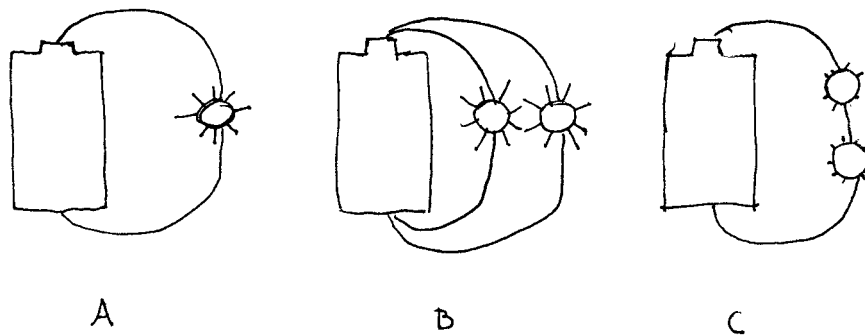
That was an early revelation for me – how much the scientists loved their subject matter. I remember discussing this with a literary friend – how astonished he was to read, in scientists' comments on their work with and for kids, so much passion for their subject matter. And even more surprising: that was what they wanted to share. They wanted to make curriculum that would engage kids and teachers in their – the scientists' – own passions.

That meant, of course, engaging kids and teachers in the details of the subject matter:

- seeing on film the dividing of a greatly magnified frog egg, as cell lines formed and multiplied, visible indentations on the pudgy brown egg;

- "tuning" the strings of two pendulums until they would make 50 swings back and forth without getting out of sync, or until one would make exactly 3 swings, say, while the other made 1 – and they'd hold that relationship through 9 swings to 3, 21 swings to 7, all the way 30 swings to 10, and beyond;
- making and Xeroxing pages of typed 0's, totalling a million 0's posted along the school corridor walls – to see what a million is;
- watching the moon on successive twilights, to see it from night to night approach and then pass Jupiter;
- noticing how many sheets of paper the light from a small flashlight bulb can be seen through;
- figuring out how to fit together the bones of a rabbit skeleton (a rabbit's pelvis bone, which is very elongated, looks more than anything like bones for the rabbit's ears);
- capturing some of one's own exhaled air in a tube, and comparing it with air that a candle has burned in;
- watching a butterfly emerge.

None of the frameworks of the first week's discussion had engendered passion. But the work itself did. And soon I – as a person with no science background – found myself captured, too. I was thrilled with what I was learning and how I saw myself learn. Here's a problem that I remember:



If you have two bulbs attached to a battery as in circuit B, each is as bright as one bulb attached as in circuit A. If the two bulbs are attached as in circuit C, they are both dimmer. My question was, how long will the batteries last? That is, how much "juice" is each set-up using? My first prediction was that battery B will wear out twice as quickly as battery A, and Batteries A and C will wear out at the same time. We set them up, with new batteries (and new bulbs, just to be sure) and went home for the night.

But I was re-thinking this prediction, at home in my living room that evening. I had worked enough with batteries and bulbs to know that something needed to run around from one end of the battery, through the bulb, and connect again with the other end of the battery. I also knew that if a piece of wire made that connection, without a light bulb along the way, the battery wore out *very* fast. I figured that the plain copper wire allowed it to run around more easily, and that the more it ran around, the more it got

used up. (I was not at all clear about what the "it" was.) There needed to be a complete ring and in my experience it had usually been a ring of wire, though I had also made it work with aluminum foil, knives and forks, or a key chain. The idea came to me that the entire ocean of air in which the battery sat might also be able to make the link. It would no doubt take a *really* long time (since in my experience batteries that are sitting around in the air, unattached to anything, take months or years to wear out). But I had the sense that maybe air *could* carry this at a minuscule pace. And then the following idea came: maybe there was a continuum between a good piece of copper wire, which would use everything up very quickly, and the ocean of air, which might use it up *exceedingly* slowly.

As I imagined whatever-it-is-that-moves trying to run around from one end of the battery to the other, I saw that the bulbs in the B set-up would help the top and bottom connect twice as well as the bulb in set-up A – which supported my original prediction. But now I also saw that set-up C would *keep* them from connecting so well – the little filament wires in the bulbs were not copper and they were very skinny, affording much less space for traveling through than the regular copper wire that was attaching the battery to the terminals of the bulb holder. Going through two little non-copper filament wires, one after the other, would be twice as much impediment as going through one – like going through twice as long a one-lane tunnel. In a sense it would be a step on the continuum towards having only the ocean of air. So battery C should take longer to wear out than battery A. And this did prove to be the case.

I'll never forget the exhilaration of figuring that out. That feeling caught me, and kept me. And all that I learned there has stayed with me and taken me further. I have loved figuring out why a see-saw always rests with one end down, while the arm of a balance beam stays horizontal; knowing about using – and how *not* to use – booster cables; observing, as Robert Frost put it, that "Nature's first green is gold"; greeting the moon when I find it where I knew I would find it; appreciating the relationships between shadows on and reflections in a pond (also shadows on the bottom of the pond – which I found were distinct from shadows on the surface).

As David Hawkins has pointed out, subject matter is in the world, it is not what is in books. The material that this curriculum presented, the material "presented from without," as Dewey puts it, was the world itself.

Over the years I have worked with people who were passionate about many different subject areas, who found ways to give learners of all ages various aspects of "the world" – the poem, the artifacts, the mathematical problem, the place to be mapped, the documents. (See Duckworth, 2001.) Alythea McKinney, for example, presented ninth and tenth graders with wooden butter molds, often overlooked objects that helped 19th and early 20th century farm women meet particular social and economic needs (McKinney, 2004). As the students examined the objects, they called each other's attention to, and worked to make sense of, their sizes and shapes, their design, composition, style, and construction, their capacities and wear patterns. As they examined related documents and images from the same period, they observed users of the objects, their dress and their motions, and the arrangement and character of the

spaces they and the objects inhabited. In thinking about and trying to integrate details like these – the kinds of evidence historians love – the students began to question their previous ideas about women of this time period, and to develop deeper, more complicated understandings of their lives.

All of these materials from science, history, literature, mathematics, art, language are able to invite learners' minds into dialogue with what teachers consider important to know about our world. The materials are filled with detail that can captivate many different minds – as the world can! Lisa Schneier writes, "[I]t is through the very complexities of a subject matter that its students gain access to it. The web of relationships that make up any real phenomenon provide its many entry points" (1995, p. 9). If materials are slender, the only questions likely to be posed are the teacher's. If a question is not real for learners, minds are not brought to bear – the mind does not join the subject matter in a single reality. Lara Ramsey writes, "Without some recognition of why a problem is problematic – without a sense of contradiction or surprise – there is no foothold for approaching new understanding" (2004, p.6). A problem is not a problem unless it is a problem. Thought will not be given to it.

The questions the materials raise in learners, and the interest they provoke, must be seen as legitimate. *Nothing* happens until the interest has been touched. The reality of the subject matter of the world and the reality of learners' minds – bringing them together is the reality that Dewey seeks. If the integrity of each is preserved, they cannot but meet.

We have found that one way to write curriculum is to write a case history. Here is what I did, here is what the learners noticed, here is what I did next, here is what happened this time alas, here is what I think I will do next time instead, for these reasons – and so on.

We have also found that it is by no means always necessary to have highly developed curriculum materials. It is quite possible – and I would urge, essential – with what is at hand, and within a school system's required curriculum, to make a place where students find their own problems. Often at the basis of this work is the simple question, what do you notice? Here are three examples.

Anne Collins (2004), exasperated in her unsuccessful attempts to teach her seventh graders about mixed numbers, decided to do this: She wrote many mixed number relationships all over the blackboard and asked the students what they noticed. They came up with everything they had not learned in her three previous lessons. "That strategy is one I use more and more in my teaching. I am constantly giving examples... and asking students what they notice, what they can say about the examples given, to write conjectures about what they are thinking."

Heidi Stewart was asked as a student teacher to teach about the use of commas (1995, pp. 1, 2).

On Friday, I taught the lesson on commas that I had been working on. It went superbly well. The students were engaged in the lesson throughout

the period and really seemed to both enjoy and learn the material (and we're talking about commas here). I also felt confident and knowledgeable about the purposes and pedagogy, especially after discussing my plans with [fellow students of teaching and learning].

I introduced the lesson by asking if any of the students felt comfortable using commas. None did. I then spoke about the wonderful ideas I had seen in many of their papers and how important it was to polish their papers by using commas correctly, for, if they don't, their brilliant ideas will be lost in the world's judgment of their mechanics. I handed out the materials: sheets of comma-less sentences from the students' writing, sheets of correct comma usage in the students' writing for them to refer to, and newspaper clippings. After I had arranged the students to work in pairs, one student called me over. She wanted to tell me that I was 'doing it wrong,' that I was supposed to give them all the rules regarding commas and then they were supposed to fill out the worksheets demonstrating what they had learned."

After the pairs of students worked together on the passages that needed commas, the class as a whole worked on them with an overhead projection that allowed them to share a single conversation.

When students disagreed on comma placement, much of the class would get involved in the debate. I would move the commas to different places on the transparency according to their thinking. During this time, the students were completely engaged in the class. Together we developed a few basic rules of comma usage...I...was impressed with how much more engaged the students were when they had a chance to 'figure things out.' ...One student came up after class and thanked me for the class, saying that she had always felt unsure of herself and her writing because of commas.

Lara Ramsey copied and distributed a two-page spread called, *How the States Got Their Names*, for discussion in her sixth grade class. The question "What do you notice" captivated the students and led to wide and deep insights into U.S. geography and history, including this remarkable one: "I think I have a very important question. Oklahoma is named after Cho—how do you say it? What I'm wondering is, the Choctaw people were losing their land, and they wouldn't have been the ones to name a state without land. And if the people who made the land into a state were naming it, why would they use a Choctaw word if they were taking the land away from the Choctaws? It doesn't make any sense" (Op. cit. p. 17).

This sixth grader's insight I think demonstrates that learners' minds, when engaged with real subject matter, necessarily bring us to its heart. And the heart of subject matter – unlikely as its surface may look – contains the "social aims, meanings, values" with which Dewey was centrally concerned in the quote that opens this article.

We bring students' minds to subject matter by offering it in all its complexity, allowing for attention to the specifics which can engage us, as the specifics of our living do.

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The preceding article will appear later this year as a chapter in

Holding Values: What We Mean by Progressive Education. Brenda Engel, Editor, with Anne C. Martin (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005)

CONNECTING THE ARTS TO ALL AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

Pat Stefanchuk

...we must make the arts central in school curricula because encounters with the arts have a unique power to release imagination. Stories, poems, dance performances, concerts, paintings, films, plays – all have the potential to provide remarkable pleasure for those willing to move out toward them and engage with them. (Greene, 1995, p. 27)

The past eight years have been, for me, a most remarkable journey. I have had the pleasure of being principal of a unique elementary school, Margaret Park. While the population of the school is diverse, with an English Hebrew Bilingual Program as well as an English Program, the diversity has resulted in building an understanding and inclusive community of learners. Throughout these eight years the school has undergone changes in staff but the cohesiveness amongst staff members is because of their willingness to collaborate and work as a team. New and creative ideas are constantly emerging as a result of the collegiality amongst staff. How is it possible to foster an atmosphere where teamwork and collaboration are valued? To find the answers I began to reflect upon my own teaching experiences and how I celebrated children and events.

I began my teaching career in an elementary school teaching grades three and four, and some eight years later became an elementary music teacher. Getting to know each child I taught was my first goal as a teacher. I was always excited about what children had to tell me and how they came to understand concepts I was teaching. It was always important for me to share ideas and stories with colleagues and administrators and to involve them in the children's joy at participating in classroom or music activities. My only regret after many years in education is that I failed to write about many of these special occasions. One of the projects I want to undertake in retirement is to record the many rich stories and to reflect upon how they impacted me as an educator.

Becoming principal of an elementary school presented different challenges but I approached the job much the same way as I approached teaching. I welcomed teachers' stories about happenings in their classrooms, always showing my interest and responding to their dilemmas in a positive way. I wanted them to become inquirers about their own practice and to find their own voices. They were encouraged to take risks with respect to curriculum and to approach teaching with creativity and imagination. Unlike the junior high school where I had been vice principal, intent upon resolving major disputes amongst teenagers, I was now able to visit classrooms and learn from an amazing group of classroom teachers what it means to "unleash the imagination."

Just one month into my first year as principal I visited a grade 5/6 class. Children were

in various places around the room, mostly on the floor with large pieces of paper, busily drawing trees and sponge painting leaves. The paintings depicted autumn trees surrounded by a carpet of colourful leaves. There was something rather strange about the atmosphere within the classroom. The only sound I heard was of baroque music coming from the CD player on the counter. The teacher was with one group of students gesturing to a child. The child responded with hand movements. When the teacher saw me she beckoned me to step outside the room while she explained that they were having a “mime” afternoon. She managed to convey to the students what they needed to do to make a fall tree look realistic as well as impressionistic just by making hand gestures. As I moved through the classroom, I too made hand motions to show my appreciation of their work. I stopped to read the poetry they had written recently about “wind” and all its characteristics. The poetry had been written on sheets that had been painted in bold or soft shades of blues, greens, or grays. The results were spectacular. Each child had expressed his or her feelings about wind with such descriptive adjectives that I was able to picture and sense the mood they wished to capture. As I do each time I am given an opportunity to witness children living “consciously,” I wrote a letter to thank them for making this day special for me, a day when there was calm, gentle breeze in the midst of the turbulent whirling eddies of administrivia. I was just beginning to see how teachers at Margaret Park use the arts to make curriculum relevant to children’s learning.

As an administrator, I deliberately focus on what is working well with the students and encourage the teacher to further develop these areas and ideas. At staff meetings we talk about the amazing variety of successful teaching and learning that is taking place. We celebrate and share these events throughout the school. Each person has something unique to offer and recognizes that while one teacher may not be doing exactly what the person across the hall is doing his or her work is valued as much as the work of other staff members.

There have been so many examples of how a teacher’s creative imagination has made children’s lives richer at Margaret Park School. Teachers who embark on a theme for the year or even part of the year awaken in students the desire to stretch their minds, to explore the unknown. Teachers tell me with excitement in their voices about the responses the children have to learning about *bugs, space, the community, medieval times, the rainforest, life under the sea or river bed, even insects*. Children who find pencil and paper activities difficult and tedious will pour over books about their class’s particular theme and regale their teacher with facts they have learned about the subject. They are eager to build models, draw pictures, construct cities or castles and all the while they are learning math and science, as well as language arts and social studies. All of a sudden they want to record what they are learning. The writing and representing is suddenly not such a huge chore.

When Margaret Park School was given a three year Innovative Math Grant, the release time for teachers meant they had time to collaborate with one another. Often they would meet in grade level groups but they also worked with one another across grade levels to plan Family Math Nights or activities for One Hundred Day. Collaboration is a

springboard for creative thinking amongst teachers. A teacher facilitator conducted workshops with the teachers, explored all aspects of the curriculum and encouraged professional reading. Teachers learned ways to differentiate instruction for all learners. Soon they were including gardening as part of the math curriculum and students were designing the gardens, making plans for the school yard, and helping to look after the garden plots and plants. Each fall there was a harvest of vegetables and weighing and measuring were suddenly relevant to learning. Putting together a hearty soup or stew was also part of the process.

As a component of the *Greening of the Grounds* project, a math initiative, staff embarked on an arts program to strengthen understanding of aboriginal teachings. Several aboriginal artists shared their arts and culture with the students and enriched their lives. Children worked with watercolours for the first time, and did bead and leather work. They listened to storytellers and learned songs. They baked bannock and were introduced to sharing circles. Sharing circles are now a regular occurrence in classrooms.

Within a year of introducing staff and students to aboriginal teachings, our resource teacher, Fatumah, introduced the Pow Wow Club to the students. Children from both the English and Hebrew Bilingual Programs regularly participated in the club ably led by a parent in the community. The children loved to perform their dances at assemblies for a very appreciative audience. This same teacher developed a Life Skills program where children are given opportunities to do a number of visual arts enrichment projects. With the help of the aboriginal artist in residence the children created a large collage piece that was displayed on Portage Avenue. Since then the children have created original pieces of art for the "Art on the Avenue" project sponsored by the City of Winnipeg.

An amazing collaborative project took place in 2000, the Millennium Year. Our kindergarten teacher released her imagination by suggesting that every member of the school community create a Millennium tile to be displayed in the halls of the school. Everyone from the custodians to the Child Guidance Clinic staff participated and the result is a colourful display of artwork from over 300 students and 40 staff members. Every tile is numbered and the names are recorded above each section of the wall. Fifteen years from now, when the school celebrates its 50th anniversary, students and staff will return to find the tiles they designed in 2000.

The Annual Statements of Professional Growth are creative gifts given to the administrators and received with great joy. Each year there are gems that indicate the incredible depth of thought and understanding that teachers have given to a child or a project undertaken. All of these pieces of writing are remarkably creative and they include metaphors, poetry, whimsical drawings of children, elaborately constructed crafts, power point presentations, photography, songs that are sung and recorded on tape, and discoveries of "Aha" moments in teaching. They illustrate the creativity that is present in every classroom.

Last year Seven Oaks School Division focussed on The Arts by offering a one day Arts

Conference and an Arts in the Park day. Naturally all of the Margaret Park staff attended the Arts Conference day and were immersed in a variety of activities. The latter event involved students from the entire school division and included performances by bands, choirs, drama, and dance groups. There were buskers all over the park grounds. Rainbow Stage and the Pavilion showcased the visual arts. Our school presented a variety of performances. The choir sang, there were Hip Hop Dancers, Israeli Dancers, and the Pow Wow Club. The Juggling Club even staged a demonstration at a buskers' station. Several staff members participated in Arts in the Park and four people served on the organizing committee. This event was singly the best example of the many programs that enrich children's learning.

This year teachers and paraprofessionals have included the arts in so much of what they do. They have recognized that the children are much happier when they are able to engage in artistic pursuits throughout their week in school. Whether the activity is a craft activity, visual art lesson, music or dance, the children are most enthusiastic and cooperative. Imagine that! Staff also discovered they, too, were happier when engaged in artistic pursuits. Two of our professional development days were devoted to exploring art forms. We learned how to "Stomp," how to make masks, how to do water colours, how to write poetry, how to do Israeli dances and how to line dance. We also created our own dance based upon a particular piece of music. Many staff members expressed that those two days were clearly the best inservice days in a long while. Sometimes events that occur are planned but other projects just seem to find their way to Margaret Park. We have had a unique year.

"I'm calling you about a proposal for an original children's opera. I have been asked to coordinate a project with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra that would involve students from six schools throughout Winnipeg. I am interested in including a school from each school division and would like to suggest Margaret Park as one of the schools. I anticipate working with approximately twenty students from each school throughout the year, with the assistance of your music teacher. At the end of the school year the children will present an opera based on the story of King Midas. Musicians from the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra will join the student instrumentalists. The opera will include songs, dances, instrumental parts, and feature solo roles. We will have costumes and sets and the story will highlight aspects of Greek mythology and history. Incidentally, each school will choose a different mode (Dorian, Lydian, Phrygian, etc.) to compose their musical numbers. Because the project is with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra the children will be expected to attend at least two of the performances during their regular season. Schools will pay only \$5.00 per ticket for students and adults."

The music teacher and administrators recognized the huge commitment that would be required from everyone to ensure that this project was successful. Retired music teacher Marcelline Moody was the creative force behind the venture and she made several visits to the school to work directly with the children but relied upon Karen, our music teacher, to work tirelessly during noon hours to keep the momentum going. While we started with twenty students, only fourteen were able to complete the project. Some children lost interest while a couple of students had to drop out because of poor

attendance at school. What made this program special? Marcelline involved the children in composing pieces of music for the play. They wrote many of the lyrics and chose instruments to be played. They created their own dance for their part in the opera. Children's creative input was valued in every step of the process. Marcelline instilled in all of the children a discipline for working as a cooperative team. If they were going to play with professional musicians they would have to be perfectly ready. On June 3rd, at Jubilee Place, more than 100 students along with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra performed for a capacity audience. The final fourteen students who stayed with the project were able to articulate how much they each learned by being part of this unique project. How many ten and eleven year old children can claim to have played with professional musicians? I am truly jealous of Michael who got to play tympani right alongside the principal percussionist for the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

"I couldn't sleep last night. I've had this tune going around in my head for a very long time. Suddenly, I had to get up and put lyrics to the tune. After having just been to a professional development session with Michelle Borba I knew I had to write a song about the seven moral virtues and incorporate that song into what I do every day in my classroom."

This is the second year that we have been working on the Moral Intelligences as developed by Michelle Borba. Each month at assembly, a different class of students presents an activity, role play, skit or movement piece to show the particular virtue the school has been highlighting. In January, Lori, our grade four teacher, attended Michelle Borba's workshop and came up with the idea for the chorus of a song the class titled *A Better World*. *(The complete lyrics are reproduced on page 18 of this issue.)*

Now, songwriting comes naturally to Lori. After all, she sang professionally in an all women's rock band for ten years. The next morning she came to school with her guitar in hand and sang the chorus for the kids in her class. Then she encouraged them to come up with the ideas for the verses. Soon they had a complete song. The day she invited some of us to the class to hear them sing, we were not prepared for how beautiful the song would be or how emotional we would feel just hearing them sing it. From that point the song took on a life of its own. It was premiered at an assembly before spring break and then there was talk of a CD recording. Before we knew it the class was at a recording studio to record the song. The result was a wonderfully crafted song packaged by the children and ready for a fund raiser at the school BBQ. Money was raised so that other children could have a unique arts experience like the grade fours did, spending a Saturday learning about the recording industry through a lived experience. How exciting for each child to sing into their very own microphone while watching a studio recording artist at work.

"Since Curtis will be in hospital for a few days I thought I would create a video for him so that he will know how much we all miss him. I want to include lots of the children signing to him as well as all of the adults in the school."

Fast forward to when the videotaping is complete.

"I'm not sure how to go about editing this video but I know that Leila North has the equipment to do this. If I can't get it done there then Jaime has offered to help me. We'll just try to figure it out together."

Cheryl is fearless when it comes to doing the best job possible for her profoundly deaf student Curtis. Once she gets an idea she pursues it until it is completed. As his paraprofessional she constantly creates new materials for Curtis so he is included in everything that happens in his grade one classroom. When he ended up in hospital for several days Cheryl tirelessly went about making a beautiful video that included many familiar scenes. The classroom was filmed signing "O Canada." Our library technician read his favourite story while Cheryl signed the words. Staff members signed special messages that Cheryl taught us. There was a comical scene with Cheryl and a colleague riding Curtis's and another student's bicycles through the hallways. Finally Curtis's sister Brittany signed her own special messages to him. After many hours of editing the project was finally complete. Cheryl and Jaime added music so that Curtis's mom would always have the video as a keepsake, a special gift to her son from his friends at Margaret Park. On our in service day (May 7th) everyone had been asked to bring a favourite book they had read or were reading. Cheryl's book was her video. We began the sharing session by viewing the video that Cheryl had created. She reminded us that ASL is a language and the video was her way of showing all of us that this language is important for Curtis and for everyone who communicates with him.

"I'd love to learn some more Israeli dances. Do you think you would have time to teach us?"
"That's a great idea. Why don't we meet in the gym on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school?"

This is the conversation I imagined Heidi and Gina had before they eagerly began their regular dance sessions at 3:30 pm. If you pass by the gym on Tuesdays or Thursdays, you will find anywhere from two to four teachers dancing. They are learning Israeli dances from Gina. Three other teachers, Heidi, Gizele, and Shaena, just love to dance and they welcome the opportunity to learn from Gina who willingly shares her love of these dances. It is such a joyful sight to watch them twirling around the floor to such lively music and to see how happy and energetic they are after teaching all day. I have even convinced them to dance for assemblies. The children are captivated by these dances. Heidi, too, shares her dance abilities with staff and students. She offers several dance clubs throughout the year, hip hop and line dancing to name two. During the Artists in the Schools week when we focussed on Medieval Times, Heidi taught her children how to do the Farandole, a medieval dance. The children displayed the dance during our "Medieval Fair" in February.

"Would it be possible to meet with you and Cynthia to describe a program that I began at William Whyte School when I student taught there last year? I was able to introduce the violin to young students and that program has evolved into a Fiddle Program that is continuing to be offered at the school. I will bring pictures of the William Whyte students and show you how I actually ran the program. I have done some research and I know

where we could rent the violins for a period of seven weeks, just time enough to introduce the instrument to all of the grade two students in the school.”

For the past two years we have had the good fortune to have Elana on our staff, first as a student teacher and then as a part time teacher. She is a Suzuki trained violin teacher and plays professionally with a number of bands as well as playing solo. We began the program last May and she volunteered her time to teach the children for seven weeks. This culminated in a short recital for students and parents. This year she extended the program to include grade threes and fours. It was amazing to see how quickly the grade threes picked up what they learned last year. We have included the program in plans for next year and it will run throughout the year. The hope is to have children from grades three to five involved at various times throughout the year. The program is in addition to the regular music program.

“At the September administrators’ meeting you and I have been asked to speak about mentoring new teachers and about the process of sharing your journal writing with me. Most administrators and teachers do not engage in the kind of writing that we do and it would be interesting for us to share our reflections with administrators.”

Fast forward to December.

“Literacy is the focus of the Administrators’ Conference being held in March at Gimli. The P.D. committee would like to invite you to present a writing workshop using your “I Come From” lesson.”

Since Shaena has joined Margaret Park the staff has become more conscious of children’s writing. In particular, the profile of poetry has been raised. Shaena’s students have discovered their voices through the writing of poetry. Two of her students were included in *From A Secret Place*, published in spring 2004 by the Poetry Institute of Canada. Taking Shaena’s lead Amber encouraged her grade 5 and 6 students to contribute their short story writing to a national writing contest and several students had their stories included in a published anthology in September, 2004. Stav and Elana, both teachers of grades 4 to 6 children, have taught poetry units and one class’s poems were printed onto scanned pieces of the students’ art work while the other class displayed their poetry along with a watercolor depicting the poem.

“I don’t know what we were thinking. We just went to a meeting to find out about this science project called ‘Marsville’ and all of a sudden we were being included in the plans. We’ll never be able to accomplish everything that must be done in order to participate in the event.”

Finally, two grade 5/6 classes participated in the project. Shaena and Elana bravely tackled this endeavor allowing all of their students creative license to imagine what it would be like to live on Mars. The tasks were to create a habitable environment complete with everything a human being would require in order to survive on Mars. This project took incredible courage since the two young teachers had to facilitate and guide but not take ownership for the problem solving required to accomplish everything. The

children collaborated with students from H.C. Avery and together they constructed their habitat in the Maples Collegiate on April 23rd. Both teachers would agree that this undertaking was by far the most difficult one of the school year because they were fearful that on link up day they would be perceived as “not in control” or worse still, they would be seen as incompetent teachers. It was hard to trust the children to know what to do and how to do it. Amazingly, the day went splendidly and every habitat was completed and fully functional. The kids had a truly awesome experience.

These are just some of the wonderful arts experiences that have happened or are ongoing at Margaret Park School. I believe that educational leaders must take the time to discover teachers’ strengths and talents. To accomplish this one must visit the teacher’s classroom often. Each class has its own unique culture and the classroom community is definitely shaped by the teacher’s style and character. Administrators, if they are to fulfill their obligations as leaders, must take time to discover what makes each teacher successful at his/her job. Even teachers who are experiencing difficulties need positive feedback regarding the work they are doing. After all, teachers are constantly finding ways to help students who are struggling celebrate their successes. Teachers at Margaret Park exemplify what Maxine Greene says in all of her writing:

Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once: they ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility. (Greene, M. 1995, p. 43)

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LETTING THE MUSICIAN OUT TO PLAY WITH THE TEACHER

Lori Hoppenheit

Writing, I have found, is a great way to learn from oneself. This piece is a collection of excerpts from my journal. It chronicles the wondrous and often rocky journey of a school year. The ending, I assure you, is a happy one.

September: I can't believe I have to start over. I came to this school two years ago and began developing relationships with some of the most amazing kids ever. Most of those kids remained in my class last year, and the few new ones who joined us fit almost seamlessly into our little class family. We had such a great time together, but the year ended too quickly. The last day of school in June was one big weepfest – they cried, I cried, it was hard to say goodbye. Now I am beginning a new year with a fresh bunch of kids and I'm worried that I'll never achieve the same kind of closeness with them. I'm worried that they won't get my jokes, that they won't get who I am as a person as well as a teacher. Can't I just have my old kids back, please? They get me. I can't remember how I got them to get me, but they do.

November: I'm going to bed. I've just had another rough day with my class. It seems as though my worries from September are coming to be. Why can I not build relationships with these kids? I actually prayed tonight. *Please, let me figure out what it is that I'm supposed to be doing with my life. This can't be it.*

It's a few hours later and I've just gotten out of bed. I awoke with a tune in my head – a guitar riff that I came up with in August. There are also words and a melody swimming around in my brain. "Try on the shoes of somebody else for a while...something, something.... Are you treating them with kindness, making good decisions...." I better get up and do something with this.

I've just finished the lyrics and vocal melody for what I have now decided will be my "Empathy" activity on Monday morning. I'm going to take this idea and my shiny new guitar to school and I'm going to write a song with my class. What a great idea, you clever girl.

Monday morning, before school: *What are you thinking? You are seriously going to do this? You've never written lyrics before, you're not a music teacher, who do you think you are?* Ah, the voice of my own self-doubt. Sometimes it's the only voice I can hear, but not today. I swallow hard, pick up my guitar and walk out the door. I'm not entirely sure how I'm going to go about this once I get to school, but therein lies the beauty of having grown accustomed to flying by the seat of my pants; I have absolute faith that something will come to me.

Monday morning, at school: "For our empathy activity today I want you to imagine yourself as three different people. You're going to write three very short journal entries

while standing in someone else's shoes. The first pair of shoes belongs to a kid who gets bullied at school all the time. Why? How does she feel? What does she wish others would say or do to help? The second pair of shoes belongs to a bully. She doesn't really want to be a bully, but she doesn't know how else to be. The third pair of shoes belongs to the kid who sees all the terrible things that go on between bullies and their victims.

She wants things to be different. When we finish our journal entries, we're going to use the ideas to write lyrics to a song about the seven moral intelligences. This is what I've written so far."

*Try on the shoes of somebody else for a while, and walk around.
Are you treating them with kindness? Are you making them feel like they belong?
Are you making good decisions to respect and to be fair?
Because the way that you treat people can make a difference in somebody's day.*

Monday afternoon: The kids' "journal entries" contained such great ideas with many common threads among them. We used as many of the ideas as we could and now our song is finished. I can hardly wait to play this for Pat and Cynthia – who am I kidding? I want to play this for everyone! It's amazing! I'm so happy I had the guts to do this today!

A Better World

*Try on the shoes of somebody else for a while and walk around
Are you treating them with kindness, are you making them feel like they belong?
Are you making good decisions to respect and to be fair?
Because the way that you treat people can make a difference in somebody's day*

*I don't want to go to school today, I'm afraid of what the kids will say
Will they tease me 'cause of my new hair, or make fun of the clothes that I wear?
If only I had a friend who would stand up for me and say,
"So what if you are different, we all are and that's OK!"*

Chorus

*I don't want to go to school today, my friends think that I'm just like them.
They think that it's fun to push other kids around and bug them 'cause they have no friends*

*But what would they do if I told them that acting that way is not cool?
Would they turn on me, would they ditch me? I just don't know what I should do*

Chorus

*I want to make a change (a change)
Because we all deserve to live in a better world (a better world)
If everyone would just try, we could all learn to get along
And make a brighter day for everyone, for everyone*

Chorus

*Let's make a difference starting today
Let's make difference for a better world, a brighter world starting today*

Later that week: We played the song for as many people as would listen today. It moved our audiences to tears every time. So it's not just me thinking that we've created something pretty powerful here. We need to record this. We need to play it on the P.A. on Monday mornings as our Moral Intelligence theme song. We need to go on A-Channel to show the whole city what an incredible thing we've done together. Send a copy to Oprah; send a copy to Michelle Borba. Everyone in the world will want to hear this song! These kids are so special, so awesome, so loveable! What a great class! I'm so lucky.

May 2004: The week or so following the completion of our song was filled with great energy and enthusiasm, almost to the point of mania. Grand ideas sprung forth from my lips every time I opened them. Some of the ideas may still come to be, others probably won't. A-Channel didn't pan out, but I may still send the song to Oprah – it seems to be the kind of thing she'd like to feature. I'll definitely send a copy to Michelle Borba, the creator of the whole moral intelligence program. At the moment, my life at school has become utterly consumed by music. For starters, I run a ukulele club starting at 8:00 in the morning two days per cycle. That's right – ME at school by 8:00 – crazy! But I somehow have more energy on these early days, relishing the time I get spend with a couple of my still very special and much loved former students. I'm also going to be presenting a song writing workshop at grade five arts camp. The musicarama continues as my class will finally be going into the recording studio later this month to make a P.A.-worthy recording of our finest achievement of the year. And finally, there's another song I've been working on, one that you don't know about yet. It's for you, Pat, but I'll save the story of that song for another piece of writing I'll be doing very soon.

Saturday, May 8, 2004 – Today is the day we are in the recording studio! I wrote a bass line for the song last night. I got to the studio at 9:00 to lay the guitar, bass, and ghost vocal tracks. It's now 11:00 and the kids just arrived on the school bus, which apparently runs on weekends – who knew? My final words of advice (more like warnings – *don't touch anything, a dollar a minute people!*) are hopefully coursing through their little brains as they arrive in this most holy place. They are entering a door into my very essence where somehow my past and present have found a way to coexist. In this series of soundproof rooms, wires, and machines I feel more like myself than I have in years.

The recording is now done. I haven't stopped all day, not to eat, not to pee (too much information? Sorry). I'm not at all tired. I am euphoric. The kids just left. I have just witnessed something that defies words. I have watched young songwriters become recording artists. I had to hold back a tear or two as twenty of my students sat in the tiny recording booth and listened to the beautiful piece of music they had just created. To Shaena, I verbalize the thought that just whizzed through my brain at lightning-speed, "What does it mean when you've reached the pinnacle of your career at only four years in? How am I ever supposed to top this?"

Monday, May 10, 2004 – It's the first day we'll hear ourselves over the P.A. To celebrate I have brought gifts guaranteed to make them feel like the luckiest class in the whole school. I've rented *School of Rock* and I've ordered pizza for us for lunch. I'm such a cool teacher! But before I get to tell them about the movie and pizza, Kelly and Maria, two of my girls, pull a chair up to the front of the class and tell me to sit. I oblige, hoping I'm not about to get a pie in the face! They have a gift for me, though they don't call it a gift, they call it a poem. They get our class copy of the song and put it on the CD player for background music as they read me something they wrote over the weekend. Here is the poem that brought me to tears. They do get who I am, they understand me after all.

The Best Teacher Ever

Look at you the teacher whiz!
Cool is what you say it is
You are full of energy and you decide what you will be
You set your sights, your head held high
You dream big dreams and let them fly
You live your life by what is right
You're independent, strong, and bright
You're not some wimpy powder puff
The world is yours so do your stuff

Sunday, June 20, 2004 – Elana, Karen, Chris, and I recorded your song yesterday and I went back today to mix it. Right now, Heidi has the only copy in existence and she is putting it down as the soundtrack to the tribute film she's been working on all month. I don't know if this song "tops" the one I did with the kids but it's certainly more personal. But as I have already said, your song is a topic for a different story. As I sit here writing the final entry of my "growth journal" (you shouldn't be surprised that this is the only entry in this entire piece that is being written on the day it says it is...you should, however, be somewhat surprised that it's actually being written before next September!) I am deeply grateful for everything that this school year has brought me. At times I have been exhausted, frustrated, exhilarated, and completely dumbfounded by my own audacity to embark on such a big project. But now, as the year winds down and the frantic schedule of events is almost done, I can see the value in all of it. The mountain of tasks I faced this year not only caused me to accomplish more than I thought humanly possible, but I also found my joy in the climb. And my class – you know, the ones who were never going to understand me – has turned out to be exactly the group I needed, for they have helped guide me to the clearest understanding of self that I have perhaps ever known. I am a teacher. I am a musician. In allowing myself to be both at once I have discovered synergy. Letting the musician out to play with the teacher has made me better and happier than either of my individual talents could have predicted. I guess that's what having a passion is all about.

GOING GLOBAL WITH EMPATHY

Beth Heimbecker

“You were sitting in the park all afternoon?” Pat gasped. “Ms. Heimbecker was worried, your parents were worried and your TAA teacher was wondering where you were. All these people worried and you were just sitting in the park talking? What did you do after that?”

“I went back to Maples,” replied Anna. “I had to pick up Jasmine.”

I stared at Anna with my most disgruntled teacher face, but inside I was smiling. I was smiling because I had asked Anna if she would be responsible for walking Jasmine home from Maples Collegiate. Jasmine had been new both to Elwick and Canada in early February having arrived from Sudan. Because everything was so new I had asked Anna to look after her and see that she arrived home safely after TAA. Now, three months later, I had totally forgotten about my request but Anna hadn't and she was still walking Jasmine home.

I smiled to myself that day in the office because the whole situation was incongruent. Here was a student acting irresponsibly by skipping school but returning at the end of the day because she had a responsibility to someone else.

This year the focus of our professional conversation in our school has been on empathy. Michelle Borba (2001) defines empathy “...as the ability to understand and feel for another person's concerns. It's the powerful emotion that halts violent and cruel behavior and urges us to treat others kindly” (p.14).

As a school, we have talked about what empathy looks and sounds like in our classrooms as well as during school-wide assemblies. Given the day-to-day interpersonal struggles that occur between students in the classroom, in the gym and on the playground, teaching children how to see a situation from another person's perspective is vital to a functional and safe learning environment. It is also a natural place to begin since learning needs to begin with a point of contact which is personally meaningful. In the case of empathy that means learning to be empathetic when dealing with people with whom we are close; the members of our families and our classmates. I was lucky enough to have a group of young adolescents this year who were adept at putting themselves in someone else's shoes. Anna's story is only one of many that has occurred throughout the year. Because most of my class could already act empathetically towards those whom they knew well, I understood that I needed to extend this to a broader context. I needed to “go global” with empathy.

Why go global with empathy? Why isn't being kind to our friends and acquaintances good enough? There are a few reasons but I think the primary one lies in our very goal as educators and is articulated in the **Seven Oaks Mission Statement**. It states:

Seven Oaks School Division is a community of learners, everyone of whom shares the responsibility to assist children in acquiring an education which will enable them to lead fulfilling lives within the world as moral people and contributing members of society.

What is the connection between **moral people, contributing members of society**, and empathy? The connection I see is that we cannot behave morally and contribute to society in a positive way if we don't care. This is because acting morally requires that we think about what is best beyond ourselves to the repercussions our actions and words have on others. If we are concerned about how our decisions affect those around us, then we are showing empathy.

There are, however, degrees of empathy. One degree is to display empathy toward those we know well and with whom we spend a lot of time. This is because it is easier to be empathetic toward someone with whom we have a personal connection because we care about him or her in the first place.

Behaving morally towards people whom we do not know personally requires another level of empathy because there is no personal connection. It is caring in an abstract sense. It asks us to extrapolate how we would feel in an unfamiliar situation which is often far removed from our own experience. Empathy in these situations demands of us a deeper understanding of ourselves as human beings and the ways that we are connected through our common humanity.

In thinking about empathy on a global scale I needed students to grapple with what it means to be human because only then could they understand empathy in an abstract sense. I also needed to create in them an awareness of global conflict and suffering since we cannot be empathetic about that which we do not know. To this end I attempted to expose them to learning experiences that would build their awareness of others in the world who are suffering. Empathy would be a natural extension of this awareness.

We began the year with the United Way campaign. We talked at length about how we could make our community and our world a better place. We participated in a presentation on landmines and we also read a series of books by Deborah Ellis, the first of which was titled *The Breadwinner*. These books are the story of a young girl called Parvana. She is a child growing up in Afghanistan who must dress up as a boy and earn a living to support her mother and siblings. In addition to the Parvana books we worked in literature circles as well. Students had five books to choose from, each of which was about a child living in a war-torn country.

News items such as the U.S. soldiers accused of torturing Iraqi prisoners of war provided material for some good discussions about why acts of cruelty continue to

occur. We talked about issues of culture and how often we see our own culture as “normal” but see different cultures as less than our own. We talked about how important it is to understand different cultures and how a different cultural framework can affect how someone interprets his or her world. To this end, we studied creation stories from a variety of cultures to gain some perspective on how different cultural or ethnic groups explained the beginning of the world.

It is not difficult, especially when you are an adolescent, with neither political nor economic power, to feel overwhelmed and helpless about the atrocities which occur in our world. We spent our last bit of time together talking about how we can make a difference. I tried to convey three ideas. First, one cannot show empathy toward a group or situation if he or she knows nothing about it. Being an informed individual is key to living in a way which is empathetic towards others. Second, one can be politically active through organizations and charities that support a world cause and in this way work toward a more just world. Third, it is important to have a positive affect on our own corner of the world, whether that be our families, classroom or community. The bully on the playground is no different than the bully who tortures prisoners of war in Iraq. The only difference is in degree. By putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes we are able to avoid engaging in hurtful behaviour. In addition, we are able to be more empathetic toward those who cannot themselves understand somebody else’s perspective and behave in ways which are hurtful to others.

As the end of June approaches, I understand that I only fostered some beginning conversations around empathy, social justice and what it means to be a human being. But, it’s a start and I hope that when this group of grade eights are adults they will remember some of our conversations and make the world a better place both locally and globally.

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TEACHING FROM THE HEART: INTEGRATING EMPATHY INTO OUR SCHOOL CULTURE

Pat Plohman

It was during our school planning sessions for the last two years that staff seemed troubled by two salient points:

1. There was an ever increasing number of students coming to us in early years from homes of just terrible domestic abuse, violence and neglect. Many of our students were either observers or victims of such instability and constant family dysfunction.
2. Within and outside of our school building we were seeing an escalation in the outbursts of harm and hurt exchanged amongst students. Most obvious were the kinds of behaviour displayed by students on the playground, in the halls, in the classroom and in the community.

As a staff, our planning session was a time to reflect on what it was that got in the way of teaching and learning. We agreed that conflict between students, anger directed towards students by students and even a sense of hopelessness within students was requiring a great deal of time and energy to resolve.

At the same time our school guidance counsellor and CGC psychologist were experimenting with a program entitled TLC (Teaching and Learning to Care). When we listened to feedback from participating classrooms, teachers expressed their appreciation for the way in which the program provided time to practice social language and to engage in activities that promote empathy and perspective taking in students. The teachers shared stories of how TLC became a frame of reference for incidents and situations that required resolution.

It was based on this feedback of the success at early years that prompted our staff to embark on a journey that would explore the possibility of focussing on the development of emotional intelligence for the entire school.

Michelle Borba's book *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues that Teach Kids to do the Right Thing* provided a nucleus for discussion. We read, discussed, and outlined a plan that included professional development for ourselves and the creation of practical ideas to take to classrooms, assemblies, etc.

Five staff members volunteered to attend the professional development day with Michelle Borba and then as a follow-up planned a full day session with staff to share their learned theories and practices. What amazed me was the breadth and depth of the school professional development day as well as the enthusiasm and eagerness with

which colleagues shared activities they had already tested in their classrooms. Staff who had never previously presented in their career were sharing their experiences with conviction.

This day was the perfect example of the effectiveness of shared leadership and a collegial learning community. We acknowledged that the expertise for what we were attempting could be nurtured amongst ourselves. A learning journey was obviously more motivating and exciting than any imposed pre-scripted program to address conflict.

Throughout the last two years there has been a formalization of the integration of **empathy** into our school culture and community.

Staff have collected literature to share with students and shared classroom experiences with language and activities. This year we began with a Daniel Goleman video to discuss and respond to our continuing journey.

What evolved this year was a profile for empathy everywhere. We began our first assembly of the year introducing **empathy** buttons which all staff would wear. At each assembly thereafter – classrooms would unveil an **empathy** poster that depicted their conversations and notions about empathy. Acts of empathy were publicly acknowledged at whole school gatherings. We introduced the *empathy word of the week*. Classes created poems, skits, and artwork to demonstrate their understanding of empathy.

In our office we used the notion of empathy as the basis for discussing conflict whether it was grade K or grade eight. Every student now knows the word, what it means, and what it looks like in practice!

At this time I'm reflecting on what seems to have taken place at school. Park Palmer (1997) in his book *The Courage to Teach* writes, "To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world." Developing empathy in our students has required us to weave a complex web of connections between teachers, curriculum and students. Our successes or achievements have resulted not from what we identify as 'best teaching' methods but from our hearts. Discussions of empathy allowed all of us to be real in our caring and understanding of how we value 'real life' in school. The discussions, the relationships and the experiences have seemed so much more meaningful and purposeful as we get set to learn.

Nel Noddings (1995) writes, "We should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement." She contends, "We will not achieve even that meagre success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others." This has been the essence of the development of empathy in our school.

The possibility for incorporating Noddings' themes of care was exemplified in our

school's involvement in the *Freeze Frame Festival* this year. Students of a wide variety of academic, artistic and emotional intelligences came together to create, write, rehearse and perform a public service announcement entitled *Elwick's Empathy Project*. Their efforts were recognized with a nomination to the Freeze Frame Academy Awards but the most obvious achievement was the growth and development of interpersonal relationships amongst staff and students to complete the project. They became a compassionate, caring community of learners with an important message to share. It was with great pride that they were interviewed by media and acknowledged by adults for their contributions to such an important world message. It became an incredible example of what is possible when students are given opportunities to use their voices and creativity to demonstrate their learning.

And so next year our journey continues. We know what we know and continue to search for what else we can know. **Self-control** will join **empathy** on our stage of school priorities as we focus on our primary purpose of developing caring, compassionate, and eager learners.

The ability to choose how we interpret our world and respond to what is happening in it is what distinguishes us as humans.

The most important human endeavour is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.

Albert Einstein

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PUTTING THE “PIECE” INTO PERSPECTIVE

Nan Fewchuk

One of my favourite high school plays to direct is called *Competition Piece* by John S. Wells. I experience sheer delight watching how much fun the students have every time they perform it. The plot revolves around three different high school teachers: Miss Hockenschmoss, a perfectionist; Mrs. Mellencamp, an artist; and Ms. Grubowski, the school's football coach. Each teacher is preparing a unique group of students for the high school drama festival. The goal for each of the teachers is to win, and they go to hilarious extremes to do so.

This past April, I decided to take three of my high school classes to the annual Manitoba Drama Youth Festival held at Prairie Theatre Exchange. I realized this would be quite a challenge as the time and effort required to direct even one group is enormous, never mind three to perform in two days. But even more disturbing was the notion that my student teacher would be working with my Senior 3 students until two weeks prior to the festival date. This meant it would be impossible to take a polished piece to perform. We would have to go to the “non-competitive” festival with a “work in progress.” The thought horrified me.

Nan Fewchuk is known as a reputable director who always gets the most out of her students as potential allows. The product for the festivals in the past has always been second to none. The feedback from adjudicators makes the students and their director proud. I begin to have second thoughts. Perhaps the Senior 3 class should stay back this round. After all, there is always next year. I mean, do I really want to jeopardize the reputations of Garden City Collegiate, and more importantly, Nan Fewchuk?

In the meantime, rehearsals for *Competition Piece* are underway with the Senior 4 students. We are all getting numerous chuckles out of the lines coming from the over-the-top competitive teachers. One of the group's favourite scenes is between Mrs. Mellencamp and her “Arties”. The scene reads as follows:

Teacher: And for this year's one-act, we will perform Shakespeare's classic tragedy, *King Lear*, in the style of the Grand Kabuki!

Laura: Kabuki? That's Japanese isn't it?

Callie: But I can't speak Japanese. How can I be the lead if I can't speak Japanese?

Teacher: I have arranged for a special tutor who will teach us all to speak Japanese!

Allison: We only have six weeks!

Elliot: You mean we're going to take one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, reduce it into a thirty-minute one-act play, translate it into Japanese, learn to speak Japanese, and produce it in the style of Kabuki theatre? All in six weeks?

Teacher: Well, of course, it will require some dedication on your part.

Elliot: Dedication? We'll have to live here!

Teacher: Well, of course!

Laura: You mean eat here, sleep here, take showers here, live here?

Teacher: Well, of course!

Callie: But what about our friends?

Teacher: Unnecessary distractions.

Allison: Our families?

Teacher: They may visit you Sunday morning from 10:00-12:00 at which time they may participate in the sacrificial slaughter of various farm animals to Dionysus.

Laura: I know my boyfriend will dump me if I don't see him for six weeks!

Elliot: And I have to go to the hospital twice a week for my kidney dialysis!

Teacher: (Getting irritated) Would you stop whining? (Calmer) I have spent years of my life preparing for this project and it will doubtless be remembered as the single greatest artistic event of the twentieth century!

Elliot: It's a high school play festival!

Teacher: It's not just a play festival! It's ritual! It's society! It is the living, breathing, touching, feeling, thinking, embodiment of art! It is ...Theatre!!!

Elliot: It's a bunch of pizza-faced teenagers trying not to embarrass themselves too badly...

More hysteria erupts the classroom. Eyes are watering and bellies aching from laughter. And then I have an epiphany.

Mrs. Mellencamp begins to hit a little too close to home. Of course I should take my senior 3 students to the festival. To deny them the opportunity of performing on a professional stage for peers from a variety of schools throughout the province, and to be exposed to adjudicators who give constructive criticism in a non-competitive atmosphere would be absurd. Ultimately, the festival is about giving students a chance to perform in a safe environment and having a ton of fun while doing so. And if Mrs. Mellencamp... I mean Ms. Fewchuk has to sit on her ego for the event, so be it.

In the end, the Senior 3 class performed a series of “short snapper scenes” which were warm, moving, and funny. The students demonstrated courage in taking playful risks which is really what high school drama is all about. Sure, the set fell over and people were late for entrances and exits due to lack of rehearsal time. And yes, I almost bit my arm off when one of the performers was left improvising a song on the guitar for what seemed an eternity until his peer remembered his line. But we sure enjoyed ourselves while learning. Our participation was a stepping stone to excellence.

Yeah, that’s perspective.

MRS. BOWMAN'S LIBRARY

Bette Bowman

This statement of growth is a reflection on the journey that helped to create my classroom library (Mrs. Bowman's Library) over the past 20 years. There are two goals most important to me in my classroom. The first goal is providing enough literature and reading material for students to become excited, independent readers and learners who love reading. My second goal is to develop, each year, a caring and empathetic community of learners. We become, over the year, a family away from home, dedicated to helping and supporting each other.

Many authors and educators have influenced my teaching career. I have been fortunate to attend and listen to some wonderful speakers and educators. I feel strongly that this is one of the most influential ways to spread good teaching practices and ideas.

The three most influential educators for me in the area of reading and writing were Donald Graves, Paul Kropp, and Jim Trelease.

I was able to participate in a workshop with Donald Graves in the summer of 1990. He taught me to write with the students, model my own literacy, and to recognize every student's potential. Donald Graves taught us to wonder about our fellow man and that everyone is valuable and has a story to tell. He strongly advocated building your own literate classroom and discovering your own literacy before teaching it to your students. This inspired me to start writing poetry scaffolds myself and with my students.

Paul Kropp confirmed a lot of what I had noticed over the years. I found that many students, especially boys, stopped developing as readers in grades four and five. Paul Kropp encouraged teachers and parents to make their homes and classrooms "print rich". He feels that an excellent school provides for silent reading time and that the overall quality of the classroom reading program makes all the difference. This reading material needs to meet the interests of the students, both boys and girls. He strongly feels, as I do, that students need to be immersed in good literature. They need to have daily time to read, respond, and share their excitement and reflections on reading.

Jim Trelease came to Winnipeg in the 1980's. He was also concerned like Paul Kropp, that there was a decline in students' wanting to read. I have never heard such a motivational speaker as Jim Trelease on the subject of silent reading and reading aloud to your students and children. At the time of his visit he was newspaper reporter. Jim Trelease told us about the books in his family and life that made him laugh, cry, and touched his heart. He said this wondrous experience of reading is well within our reach as parents and teachers. All we have to do is pick up a book, turn to a child, and share this wonderful experience. Jim Trelease noticed on his travels that the avid readers in a school usually came from the classrooms where the teachers read aloud and incorporated SSR time (sustained silent reading) into the daily routine. These teachers also have a good understanding of quality literature, provide a quality collection, and are enthusiastic about reading and literature.

I came to believe that it was important to build up a library to recognize the wide range of interests and abilities of my students. At this time, I have almost 1500 novels at all reading levels from grade 1 to grade 10. From this library and other materials, I have developed a literature-based reading program to excite and meet the needs of my students.

My library has allowed me to develop a quality sustained silent reading program (SSR). This program has continued to expand and develop over the years depending on the needs of my students as readers. We have been reading to music for the past few years in our silent reading time. This discourages talking and provides a sense of relaxation to the start of our day. The most important part of my program is allowing children the time to silent read. I feel it is important to foster this skill by allowing time for it in the classroom.

Another important part of my library is reading aloud to my students daily. One of the goals of reading aloud is to motivate children to read independently for pleasure. That is why sustained silent reading is the natural partner to reading aloud. My first memory of being read to was my Grade 3 teacher who kept us spell bound reading, *Black Beauty*. Over the years in my own classroom, we have also shared some wonderful read-aloud books. These books have facilitated some great discussions about the problems of others and hopefully they have further developed our empathy for other people and communities. For example, this year my students and I immersed ourselves in the book *Parvana's Journey* and others about the plight of young girls in Afghanistan.

This book really brought to life poverty and hunger. It showed the class social issues of Afghanistan from a young girl's perspective. I truly believe that reading aloud and sharing good literature with your students will inspire them to read themselves.

In conclusion, my library has brought pleasure to many students and helped develop their reading skills and love of reading. We, as teachers, are the last hope on the journey to turning the child on to the joy of reading and creating a lifetime reader. I have always said to my students, "Remember the more you read the better reader you will become!" I hope that many more teachers continue to inspire their students to read and have as much fun and pleasure sharing good literature together as I have with my classroom community of learners over the years.

Appendix

As I was writing this statement of growth, I began to reflect that many times we don't tell the people who are important to us just how much they have affected our lives. I decided to e-mail Jim Trelease and I was delighted to get a response.

----- Original Message -----

Date: Sat, 26 Jun 2004 15:34:50 -0500
From: Bette Bowman <bettebowman@mts.net>
To: jim.trelease@the-spa.com, bettebowman@mts.net

Dear Mr. Trelease:

I have never e-mailed a celebrity before. I don't even know if you will ever get to see this e-mail but I felt it was important to send it. I am a fifth grade teacher in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. I have taught for almost 30 years. In my school division we have to write a statement of growth about our year. It can be a practice or reflection on your teaching. My reflection is titled " Mrs. Bowman's Library." I have over 2000 novels in my classroom (payed for by me!) to use in my SSR and read aloud program. My reflection is about the three most influential educators who led me on my journey to creating my library and community of readers. They were Donald Graves, Paul Kropp and you, Jim Trelease. I can still see you when you came to Winnipeg in the early 80's. I have always been an avid reader but your passion for reading inspired me to create this library. I must say I remember the years by the books I have read to my student. As I reach the end of my teaching career I will be looking for new people to read to. It just might be my dogs! But once again thank-you for inspiring me and thousands of others to start this journey with millions of students.

Bette Bowman

----- Original Message -----

Date: Sat, 26 Jun 2004 23:38:00 -0500
From: Jim Trelease <jim.trelease@the-spa.com>
To: Bette Bowman <bettebowman@mts.net>

Dear Bette:

It's 11:32 pm and I'm just finishing a long and rather boring day of editing, so you can guess how much your email meant to me. It's funny but I do remember that visit to Winnipeg on a snowy day. How nice that the visit wasn't in vain. By the way, I am not a celebrity, just a guy who loves: reading, his wife, his kids, and his grandkids -- though not in that order, please.

If you're serious about reading aloud in your retirement years, give some thought to:

1. Reading to hospitalized children;
2. Reading on tape and sharing the tapes with schools where children are least likely to have parents who read to them.

May your retirement years be filled with good health and good books.

Warmly, Jim