

Issue 22 (Fall 2006)

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Editors' Page

I want to begin by recalling a recent conversation with a friend who works in a teacher training program. She remarked that some of her university students understand competent classroom teaching as a fixed set of strategic and instrumental behaviors. In this view, knowing what to do and how to act in the classroom is an acquired set of technical skills which teacher educators are obligated to transmit to aspiring classroom teachers. In fact, that's a view I shared with many of my fellow students at the Faculty some twenty years ago and it was expressed in rhetorical questions such as, "Why don't our professors just teach us what to do in the classroom?" and "When are we going to learn something practical?"

The articles in this issue of *Teaching Today for Tomorrow* invite the reader to revisit this understanding of the teacher as technician and to consider the dynamics of critical reflection and educational judgment. These writers won't tell you what to do. They invite questions such as: What do teachers do in preparation for their work with students? What practical and moral considerations accompany the teaching act? How does dialogue among teachers inform our ability to act thoughtfully?

Gwen Birse and Melissa DeLaronde speak about the human and interpersonal connections at the heart of an authentic school community. Meaningful teaching and learning takes place in the context of conversations and caring relationships between human beings. Their texts describe how such relationships recognize and respond to the lived experiences of young people. Ricki Valcourt explores how successful approaches for the inclusion of special-needs children are developed within a philosophical state of being and not a technical skill set. Pauline Broderick playfully shows us how intellectual hubris in the form of absolute answers and knowledge as a currency of power are seen through the critical lens of the poet. We are reminded that dialogue, playfulness, empathy, perspective taking and imaginative engagement with social situations shape good teaching practices.

Janice Hill's contribution to this issue is an example of formalized action research as a conceptual tool for inquiring into a practical question. As an educator of young people with special needs she wrote, "I want my students to feel like they belong in the school as a whole, not just in my classroom." The impetus for this action research project is the teacher's moral vision. With its painstaking attention to the action research process this text offers a paradigmatic example to teachers interested in action research.

Cathleen March's article "Menominee Storytelling" works out in detail how aboriginal storytelling and oral culture can inform English Language Arts instruction and how it is possible for teachers to shape classroom curriculum that recognizes the cultural background experiences of their students.

This issue concludes with John Collins's reflections on the political responsibilities of teachers to act as critically aware and socially conscious agents of change.

BEHIND THE STORIES

Gwen Birse

The Elwick Community returned to school this year in a different place. A very public homicide had shaken an already fragile neighbourhood. Children had been immersed in the media attention and the aftermath of the incident. The support of the staff members of Elwick was not available to the community during this time and you could feel the children's sense of relief when they returned to their safe routine.

The impact of this event on our children was not immediately evident. They settled into their routine, gave hugs and showed excitement towards learning. After the first week, I had Sally in my office having a REST while she was finishing writing a story for her teacher. As she settled into her work, I joined her so she could share what she was writing about. Her story was about a shooting in the street, blood everywhere and how the police were trying to find out what happened. As we read it together, I wondered what the assignment was as it seemed like a thriller or scary Halloween tale. I asked Sally, "What did Mrs. Jones ask you to write about?". I was chilled as she innocently said to me, "She asked us to write about *what happened during my summer vacation.*"

Teachers all over the world return to school in September and eagerly ask their children to write about their summer holidays. Children share stories about swimming at the lake on hot days, seeing cousins who live far away, and sleepy camping trips with campfires under the stars. All of us hope that our children have been able to enjoy the summer weather and the different pace of life. As I read this child's words, which were about death, fear and violence, it was a moment that changed me both personally and professionally. All of a sudden I realised the comfort I had taken as a professional from the resilience of the children at Elwick. It hit me how deep these experiences are imbedded in our children and how they suppress their feelings and bury the violence which they have witnessed.

It caused me to re-examine through a deeper lens what our children at Elwick really need to grow both emotionally and academically. How could I as a person, without first-hand knowledge of a life with these experiences, assume that I could know what our children needed? I certainly know about the dynamics of our community, but the impact of poverty and violence are experiences which I feel need to be lived to be truly understood. Therefore, I began a journey of listening: to our children and to their parents about what they needed and where they were ready to begin.

Gene Maeroff identifies in his book, *Altered Destinies*, that children who are economically disadvantaged need a sense of connectedness, well being, academic initiative and a sense of knowing. This supports the basic premise which we live at Elwick. Our children need strong relationships with their teachers and also academic success in order to grow to their greatest potential. It is listening to their voices which is so critical to this process. They do not always tell us outright when they are in crisis.

They may sometimes tell us through their actions, emotional outbursts or by simply painting a solid black picture in class. Listening and observing are the critical pieces in supporting children with difficult life experiences.

I feel that my role as an administrator supports this as I have the flexibility of time, which allows slow conversations. Sometimes they are with teachers and children together and sometimes they are separate but, the goal is to help create understanding and find a next step. Listening is key to this process. At times teachers need permission to relax curricular expectations in order for children to deal with their life issues. Other times children need to be supported, as they are not ready to deal with the issue which is causing them pain. It is a balance which requires trust and is the most rewarding part of my days at Elwick. Jason, a Grade Seven student, drops by my office regularly just for a hug. If he doesn't come in I know we need to talk. Marie's mother calls almost everyday with an issue. She begins the conversation very belligerently and finishes, almost appropriately. These are the conversations which support our families in a gentle, compassionate way.

It has been said that working at Elwick is a humbling experience and that it is a place that you never forget. This is because the emotional journey that you take with families is so intense and important. If we do not have the door open and are not there when families need us, then we have missed an important opportunity. If the door closes again, it may be months before they are willing to let someone in. There is distrust and fear in allowing someone not in their world to help. We must therefore work at building relationships with families one at a time. As this trust is built, families will begin sharing not only with us but with each other and attend programs such as PACT (Parents and Children Together) and Literacy Olympics. Listening to our parents and having PACT during the day has intensified the connection between school and home.

As we welcome our new Kindergarten families and work hard to provide a rich environment in which to support them, we have realized that the needs at Elwick are so global that whole class intervention is a necessity. This need has supported and helped define the notion of teaming and integration of support services. It is the children who are defining the professional culture of the school and allowing for the establishment of a rich learning community. Andy Hargreaves states that a Professional Learning Community is a way of life, not a number of professional groups working together. It must be embedded in the culture of the school. As we reflect on and plan the new conversations that we want to nurture, they are always defined by the needs of the children. The culture at Elwick is one where teachers truly want to help our families in whatever way they can and that creates the strong bond between them.

I have the privilege of working in an administrative team where there are many slow conversations. Margaret Wheatley has truly impacted the Elwick staff with her notion of taking time to look at the big picture. Pat and I have been able to carve out this time and to make it a priority for our school. However, slow conversations are equally important for our children and families. These slow conversations allow children and families to have a voice that is heard. As we looked at our community we realized that we also

needed to broaden our professional network to include schools that are facing the same challenges of children living in poverty. These were conversations which will allow us another lens through which to learn.

It is this uniqueness of the lives our children lead that provided the rich learning environment at Elwick School. I still marvel at the resilience of the children but I find I do not take comfort in it anymore. It is a profound responsibility which we have as individuals, professionals and citizens to support families and to help hand children back their childhood. The *I Have a Dream* program in the United States secures college tuition for Grade 6 children if they complete high school. This is indeed a dream for our children. However, Nikki Brown, who works with this program states, “the truth is that at any age, if someone comes and shows genuine caring and concern, it can make a difference.” (Maeroff, 1998) It is the immeasurable acts of kindness and gentle support which allow us to make inroads into this special community. I HAVE A DREAM and it is that all of our children will return to school and write genuine HAPPY stories about *what they did on summer vacation*.

As Nel Noddings so eloquently writes,

“As we think about happiness and education we need to ask where children find happiness in present experience and how to best prepare them for future happiness.”

Happiness and Education
Nel Noddings, 2003

FINDING THE THINGS WE NEED TO LEARN

Melissa DeLaronde

We find the things we need to learn in the strangest place and from the least likely people.

Dear Important Person,

We find the things we need to learn in the strangest place and from the least likely people. One of the best moments I experienced this school year was with you. Do you remember when I first brought you down to the staff bathroom, showed you the bag with a toothbrush and toothpaste, and helped you learn to brush your teeth? Your excitement and smile made my day. I hope that daily brushing will help your teeth become stronger and last you longer.

There are two reasons this moment is marked 'one of the best' for me. First, it made you smile. Secondly, you taught me a valuable lesson. I know that not all of us come from supportive and caring homes, and I know that sometimes just brushing our teeth or showing up for school is the best accomplishment of the day, yet for some reason I was not accepting that for the students in our class. I would say it, I would think it, but I am not sure that my actions always fit with my beliefs. Since spending a year with you, and others in our room, I have come to realize and have seen how valuable those small accomplishments can be.

I needed to learn that my actions were not always fitting my words. No matter how many adults would reinforce this idea, no matter how many books reiterated the same information, and no matter how many workshops would discuss these essentials, this was clarified for me through our interactions.

You're an important person and I don't think you know that. I am pretty certain that at home you rarely get acknowledged as an important person. I wish I had told you every day since September how important you are. Hopefully, I told you enough to make a small dent.

Yours Truly,

Mrs. DeLaronde

Dear Unfinished Painting,

We find the things we need to learn in the strangest place and from the least likely people. I have grown as a teacher this year and you have directly affected that growth. You have helped me to redefine what is important to me as a teacher.

I used to think about what would happen to you in the next 5 years. I would paint this terrible picture that included drugs, alcohol, gangs, and crime. Then I would feel sorry for you. Sometimes, when I thought about the painting of your life, I would push you to work harder so that we could peel the paint off that picture. I have a tendency to think about tomorrow more than I think about today.

The reality is that today is what matters for you and as your teacher I needed to learn to take each day at a time and to teach for that moment. I need to remember that your painting is not a finished product. I can only give you what the day allows itself to give and what you allow yourself to receive. That's hard for me because I set my expectations for you, when what I need to do is help you set your own expectations.

In a way, I also set expectations for myself that were directly related to your success. The measure of my success is not a product of what your accomplishments are but what I do to provide you the opportunity to have success. I am very proud of the relationship we have developed. Although a struggle to develop, I think it is well worth the work. In having built this relationship with you, I was better able to provide success for you this school year because I better understood what your needs were.

Thank you for allowing me to rethink some of my basic philosophy about teaching children. You reminded me that today is important, and that my success is measured by what I do as a teacher, which in turn will hopefully allow for you and your classmates to experience more success.

Yours Truly,

Mrs. DeLaronde

Dear Future Leader,

We find the things we need to learn in the strangest place and from the least likely people. I was very intrigued with you when you first came into my classroom. I was prepared for many disasters and that you would be one of the center players. I quickly learned that you are a leader with untapped leadership skills and abilities. If I could do one thing differently this year it would be to concentrate more on helping you foster that natural leadership that you do possess. I know how to do this, but it took me too long to figure out that this was the type of guidance you required.

I want you to know that you make me smile or laugh everyday. That is a gift without value. You have the potential to affect people in a very positive manner or to affect people in a very negative manner. I have actually seen you accomplish both many times this year.

I am writing you this letter to let you know that I think you are a very powerful person and I hope one day you understand this concept and embrace that power.

Yours Truly,

Mrs. DeLaronde

Dear Drive and Pride,

We find the things we need to learn in the strangest place and from the least likely people. This year you have reminded me about the importance of relationships, and how people sometimes need drive to succeed. Drive can come in many different forms.

When we were sitting in the office, dealing with that bullying issue, I meant every work of how proud I was of you. You have come miles in terms of building your self esteem. When I put my hand on your shoulder and calmly direct you back to what you're supposed to be doing, or I give you that quiet reminder to pull it together, I feel proud of myself as a teacher because it has affected you in a positive way. That was work for me. There are days that I just want to scream at you, "CAN'T YOU GET IT TOGETHER," but instead I am reminded that your drive comes from my kindness and my pride in you.

Our connection has made you a better student and made me a better teacher. I just wanted to thank you for giving me the opportunity to develop more patience and to better understand myself as a teacher.

Yours Truly,

Mrs. DeLaronde

AN INCLUSION STORY

Ricki Valcourt

This is one of many I could tell...

Marie is a new grade one student at O.V Jewitt School. Her Kindergarten year was spent in Brandon in a cluster program in an elementary school. This was a low enrolment program, where Marie spent her days with other multiply handicapped children. Her needs were apparently well met by trained and compassionate staff.

Marie started grade one in the same setting. In October, when Marie's mom, Monique, made the decision to move to Winnipeg, she called me to talk about school placement in a "program" for Marie. Monique was quite taken aback when I told her that we did not have cluster programs or low enrolment settings for children with multiple disabilities, rather, we provided programming for all children within their neighbourhood school and in their age-appropriate classroom. She was sceptical as to how a "regular" school and "regular" teacher could program for her child and keep her child safe. She worried about the other kids making fun of Marie, and not understanding her different needs. Marie did indeed have a long list of special qualities, which I shared with the school. The list included:

- Non-verbal
- Blind
- Wheelchair
- No head control
- Tube-fed – Tube-feeding required once daily at school
- Very rigid
- Safest position lying on her back
- Open to speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy
- On seizure medication, but seizure-free for 3 years
- Needs a health care plan
- Uses a stander at home
- No equipment available at school in Brandon
- Uses wedge, roll when on tummy (also mirror, toys, switch)
- Uses toy bar to promote arm movement when lying on back
- Happy, smiles, makes noises
- Thrives on being around action
- Loves music
- Very alert, does not need to sleep during day
- Uses cheek switch for computer – very basic cause and effect programs
- Child Development Clinic unable to assess

The school as well questioned their ability to program and care for Marie, as they had never before had a child with such high needs. However, principal Howard Ryant quickly made the decision to accept Marie and her siblings. He and his staff made a commitment to get to know Marie and her family and to provide her with an environment in which she could thrive both socially and educationally. Monique reluctantly agreed to give O.V. Jewitt a try.

Jasmin Cavanaugh was chosen to be Marie's teacher. Jasmin had also never taught a child like Marie, mainly because she was a first year teacher. I have to admit that I too was a little worried about overwhelming a brand new teacher with a student who had so many special needs and challenges.

When I visited the class a few weeks later I realized I need not have worried. Marie was well established in the classroom, with a paraprofessional, Tracey Aisenstadt, who was confident in her ability to care for her. The other children spoke to Marie, tried to play with her, stroked her cheek or arm as they walked by. Marie was clearly an accepted and loved member of the grade one class.

What Jasmin was lacking in experience was made up for in her acceptance of the other professionals and the expertise they brought into her classroom. Occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language brought a wealth of programming suggestions and equipment into the classroom for Marie and her classmates. Jasmin made sure that all programming suggestions were made with all of her students in mind. Everyone had to have a chance to interact with Marie in a meaningful way. So all aspects of Marie's day – from physio to lunch to story time – were planned with peer participation in mind.

Almost as an aside, at another meeting, Howard showed me Marie's first term report card. Marie's report card, along with those of her classmates, was part of Jasmin's first ever set of report cards. Jasmin had figured out how to record Marie's growth and development in a way that would both inform Monique and reassure her that her daughter's needs were being met in a caring, respectful and inclusive environment. The report card chronicled in photographs and words, not only Marie's learning journey, but also the learning of her peers and teachers. Jasmin was clearly proud to be Marie's teacher and seemed keenly aware of the meaning and importance of community.

As Howard reminded me, inclusion is a philosophical state of being, not a specific skill set that can be taught in isolation of the philosophical underpinnings. Inclusion is a stance that teachers like Jasmin and Tracey and Howard take and demonstrate every day, both in and out of the classroom.

So my point (and I really do have one) is that if a first year teacher can so ably understand, live and embrace the concept of inclusion; and, if a child with so many significantly different needs can so fully and genuinely be included in a classroom community, why can't we all do it?

So here's our challenge: (*to paraphrase Thomas King*) – Take Marie's story for instance. And Jasmin's. They're yours. Do with them what you will. Tell them to friends and colleagues. Make them the topic of discussion at a meeting or conference. Forget them. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life (or career) differently if only you had heard their stories.

You've heard them now.

FROM THE IVORY TOWER TO THE FRONT LINE

(a film script)

written by Pauline Broderick

inspired by Federico Fellini's 8 ½

Act One

Scene One

A large auditorium. It is empty. The stage lights are on and a podium is center stage. The room appears ready for an occasion.

Slowly pan around the details of the room; ancient paintings of academics, wooden fixtures from endangered trees, worn velvet seats.

A large banner above the stage proclaims

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be lighted.”
(Plutarch)

We hear the sound of single footsteps on the hardwood stage.

Cut to:

Close up of the shoes as they progress.

Pull back:

To reveal **The woman** in a gown and mortarboard. She arrives center stage, clears her throat and recites

If all we seek are answers
(a commodity of our day)
Then poetry has lost its place
(decayed to formal rhetoric)
Knowledge becomes a currency of power
(memory lost: another absolute solution)
Understanding claimed with no meaning sought
(reason over rapture, intuition, experience)

If all we seek are answers
(driving all else to marginal frontiers)
Then our teachers have lost their place
(become the bank machines of method)
Learning no connection to its mythology
(structures void of consciousness)
School a place of ordered panic
(tearing soul from molded spirit)

If all we seek are answers, answers, answers,
(certainty espoused)
What hope lies in wait for the unshaped question?
(born of the yet unspeakable)
Known only in the living of it
(the unanticipated itch that directs invention)
The chord less cries of inquiry
(that seeks nothing less than to change the world)

Silence rings through the hall. Quietly at first, then louder, “Pomp and Circumstance” begins to play as diplomas wrapped in lavender ribbons rain down from the ceiling. With a big smile on her face **The Woman** leaps back and forth across the stage trying to catch one. As the music climaxes she achieves her goal.

Crane Shot:

From high above the stage we see the satisfied woman clutch the diploma in victory. Suddenly
A Tsunami hits.

Water pours in from every direction. Huge ocean waves engulf **The Woman**.

Cut to:

Underwater. Hundreds of people are underwater. They make their way around floating desks and chairs, overhead projectors and schedules. Some of them look like they have been here before and proceed to efficiently make their way to the surface. Others look as surprised and confused as **The Woman**.

For a brief moment, she comes face to face with a panicked dark haired child weighed down by the paraphernalia. **The Woman** tries with all her might to free the child but can't. Out of breath, **The Woman** makes her way to the surface.

Cut to

The Woman breaking the surface amidst the debris.

Pull back:

To reveal a large group of young people treading water.

The Woman is in the middle of a multitude of faces.

Some eyes are filled with expectation; others register her helplessness and start to swim further out to sea.

Woman: Don't go that way! The shore is over there! Wait!!

Young Girl: (treading water beside the woman) They know where the shore is.

Woman: Where are they going?

Young Girl: The other direction.

The woman sees the **Young Girl** for the first time. She has mascara running down her face and a mouth full of multi-coloured braces that sparkle brilliantly.

Tons of waterlogged paper rides the surface of the waves and sticks to those trying to stay afloat. Every page is marked IMPORTANT INFORMATION. **The Woman** tries to absorb the information but the paper clumps together and the effort of staying afloat is beginning to sap her energy. She is pulled under, once, twice... and then a burst of brilliant, multi-coloured stars fills the frame as we slowly fade to black.

Cut to

A burst of brilliant, multi-coloured stars on black poster board.

Pan down:

To a pair of waterlogged shoes under a teachers desk.

Pull back:

The Woman has a large paintbrush in her hand. She is making posters. Pan the text.

"Education is, not preparation for life; education is life itself." John Dewey

"I do not put my faith in institutions, but in individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly and act rightly. They are the channels of moral truth." Rabindrath Tagore

From the hallway, we hear a spray paint can shaking up and down. **The Woman** moves to investigate and finds graffiti on the wall. It reads, *"What is the experience of one person in this epic tide of human events?"*

She looks up and down the hall but the only evidence of the artist is small wet footprints. She follows them. They lead to a computer lab. It is full of students plugged into another

place. They are quietly engaged. The **Young Girl** with the sparkling braces motions for **The Woman** to take the chair beside her. **The Woman** sits and turns the computer on. The screen reads

*“The first and wisest of them all professed
To know this only: that he nothing knew...” (Milton, Paradise Lost)*

Young Girl: You have work to do?

The Woman: Yes. They want me to tell them what I have learned... how I have grown... from this experience but I don't feel ready to do that yet. I haven't had enough time to process the experience. I am still living it, day-by-day, minute-by-minute. I'm trying to invest everything I can in the moment I inhabit... and it is very difficult, to halt that process and reconsider what has been. I must say. I have started a million times... in a million different ways but it all feels contrived... like an academic exercise...

Young Girl: I know how you feel...

The Woman: I could pick a specific moment in the ocean of moments I have experienced. I could mine it for its underlying nuggets of wisdom...

Young Girl: Tell me about one of those moments.

The Woman: Well that's my point. There are so many... My time here has been full...

Young Girl: I understand. You must have many stories...

The Woman: Yes, I do.

Young Girl: Then tell me one... Show me one... A wise man said that it is the task of every artist and scientist to re-describe his or her experience. To re-tell the stories. Make visible what is not. Speak the unspoken. Look at the challenges not just through the numbers and measurements of the social scientist but also through the critical lens of the poet. He says that we must look closely at our challenges, name them, explore them to their depths so we can find a way to navigate around/under/through them.

The Woman: But it is very hard to do that.

Young Girl: Yes.

The Woman: Hummmm....

Reluctantly, **The Woman** logs on to the computer and brings up a file.

Young Girl: May I see it?

The Woman sighs, then complies. The **Young Girl** reads it out loud.

The Ones that Get Away
(A Pedagogical Pondering)

Lost Moon. That is what Jim Lovell titled the description of his ill-fated journey to the moon in Apollo 13. In the drama of that near tragedy a million miracles occurred to allow the astronauts to return to the planet safely in their damaged craft. Yet the title of his book reflects none of these miracles. Instead he called the book *Lost Moon*. At that point in the processing of his life-altering experience, a man who had been to outer space was propelled by a desire to acknowledge that something had been lost and that loss was worth thinking about. If for no other reason than to bear witness to its occurrence. This growth statement is a bearing witness to a loss felt this teaching year.

Young Girl: (looking at **The Woman**) You are right. It sounds contrived. Like you are hiding behind the words.

The Woman: Yes.

Young Girl: This story doesn't have a happy ending. Does it?

The Woman: No it doesn't.

Young Girl: Why not?

The Woman: Because it starts with hubris. A hubris that I brought into a relationship. A hubris that led me to believe that "Every problem will have a solution. Every challenge will be met." Hubris. I know that now. It took the experience of running out of procedures, tricks, lists, recipes and experiencing the end of the rope to make me realize things don't always work out so neatly. There are limits to... I don't have the language to express this yet.

Young Girl: Try. Do the best you can.

The Woman: I reached the end of my rope, dangled there for as long as I could, then let a person go.

Young Girl: Maybe that person wanted to go? You can't touch them all you know.

The Woman: We need to think like that to survive don't we? We need to rationalize our failures. Place blame outside the structures that contain us. Find the fault outside ourselves.

Young Girl: If you could live the experience again, what would you do differently?

The Woman: I don't know. The speed and demands of the day reduce my ability to dream outside the box, to imagine possible ways and alternate solutions. You just get too darn tired, you know?

Young Girl: Too tired... yes.

The Woman: So not having her there became a solution. I instigated that solution. I feel the weight of that solution yet also the relief of it. Things are easier now. I can remove my emotional flack jacket and work on other connections.

Young Girl: Too darn tired... yes.

The Woman: Hubris.

She exits the file. The desktop message returns.

“The first and wisest of them all professed
To know this only: that he nothing knew...”

Fade to:

The hallway. We hear the sound of a spray can shaking up and down.

Cut to

The hallway. A puddle.

A pair of wet feet standing on tiptoe.

Cut to

A hand spray-painting a wall.

Slow Motion Fade to

Drops of the blue paint splattering the ground beneath the wet feet.

Close Up.

The puddle beneath the feet.

Each drop of spatter deepens the colour of the water.

Fade to: The ripples in the water.

Fin.

THE USE OF ROLE-PLAY TO INCREASE THE COMFORT LEVEL & CONFIDENCE OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE HALLWAY: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Janice Hill

Reconnaissance

I teach a special needs class in a high school setting. The students' disabilities include developmental delays, autism spectrum disorders, mental health issues, learning disabilities, and hearing impairments. The sixteen students often have their core subjects with me and are integrated into options classes according to their interests or abilities. I want my students to feel like they belong in the school as a whole, not just in my classroom.

When I first joined the school I understood that part of my mandate was to find ways to increase the visibility of the students with special needs in the school. To the administrator, who had previously worked with me in a middle school where the students with special needs were fully integrated, it felt like they were too separate and isolated in the current situation.

One incident in particular stands out in my mind as reinforcing the idea that things had to change. I had agreed to let another teacher and his students use my classroom, TV and VCR while my students were with another teacher. When my students returned to the classroom one of them immediately went to his shelf to see if anything was missing and one of the paraprofessionals chastised me in front of the class for allowing these other students into the room. She felt that now that the other students knew what we had, it would all be stolen. There was clearly a fear of the "other" students by both staff and students, a definite "us and them" mentality. Rather than encourage inclusion, two of the long time staff, due to past thefts, felt the students with special needs needed protection from the "other" students. One of the male students considered students greeting him in the halls as bugging him. Another student made comments such as "All teenagers have spray cans in their lockers." when we were doing graffiti removal for *Take Pride Winnipeg*. I was not feeling comfortable about the culture of distrust between my class and the rest of the school. My first year's annual statement of growth was about how much the culture of my classroom had to change.

Sometimes when a student with special needs did interact with their peers, they were taken advantage of due to their inability to judge who was a friend and who wasn't. In their attempt to make friends and hang out in the hallways they were talked into giving up money or belongings or into doing something inappropriate.

In my second year some of the fear of others was lessened. However, despite the efforts of colleagues who organized intramural and noon hour activities, I was unable to convince any of my students to participate in any of the events. The teachers were more than willing to include them but they resisted. Only one of the boys joined in some spirit

week relays because a group of students from outside of our class had invited him onto their team.

Over the years that I have worked with students with special needs many parents have expressed concern over their child's lack of significant relationships outside of their family. Their wish is that their child form lasting, mutually beneficial friendships with their peers the way other children do. The students themselves want this but don't have the skills to go about making it happen.

In a discussion with a parent over an Individual Education Plan, she voiced a very valid point about what her child needed to learn in order to become less vulnerable. One of the possibilities that arose from our discussion was the use of role-play to practice the necessary skills. During the summer, while looking for materials on teaching Family Life Education to developmentally delayed students, several of the articles I read supported what we had discussed.

Social skills are an important factor in acquiring and maintaining work as well as having meaningful social connections and support (Asaki, Gumpel & Tappe, 2000). These crucial skills are often left to incidental learning. Students with developmental delays do not learn well that way. They require concrete learning experiences in order to understand and apply the necessary concepts. Unfortunately, the restrictions imposed on them prevent them from taking part in the very experiences that would help them to learn what they need to know to succeed socially (Pueschel & Sustrova, 1997). Students with developmental delays benefit from information being presented in a variety of ways. The use of direct instruction, repeated practice and programming for generalization and transfer of skills to real life situations are all useful in teaching the skills of social interaction. In order to help students retain skills, teaching should be embedded into natural settings throughout the students' day (Blanchett & Wolfe, 2002). Role-play and rehearsal have been shown to be effective instructional strategies (Pueschel & Sustrova, 1997) because students are actively involved and practice can take place in a natural setting (Blanchett & Wolfe, 2002). Role-play has been shown to help with socially appropriate behaviour and interpreting social and sexual cues. Guidelines for the role-plays are needed and it is important to give ongoing constructive feedback to the students (Blanchett & Wolfe, 2002).

Action Research Question

My class history, concerns from parents and the research I had read led to my decision to pose the question: Will the use of role-play affect my students' comfort level and confidence in the hallway, thereby increasing their level of inclusion in the school?

Intervention #1

For my initial action plan I decided to use our skills for independent living class as the time we would use to learn about acting confidently, saying no and making good decisions. Direct instruction was used to first introduce the skills, followed by role-playing to practice those skills. In order to make the role-plays relevant, I asked the support staff to help by recording incidents they observed between students that could

be used as role-plays. I also reinforced what we were learning by reading the book *How To say No and Still Keep Your Friends* by Sharon Scott (1997) as part of our Language Arts class. We also began a weight-training program every other day to reinforce the student's confidence and posture. I looked at integrating the social skills we were learning as ways of embedding the learning into their day and a way to provide the necessary repetition.

I explained to my students that I was doing an action research project to see how role-play would help them to be more confident in the hallways so they would feel more comfortable when they were out of the room. I also told them that I hoped they would join in more of the school activities over the lunch hour. I asked them if they were comfortable with me doing this with them. They all agreed to participate and seemed quite happy to be a part of my research. I also sent home permission slips to their parents (Appendix A). Eleven out of sixteen parents returned the permission slip agreeing to have their child participate. One parent refused permission. The quick return of the form showed that the students were interested in the project. They had given their parents the form and reminded them to sign them. A few of the students had never returned forms so quickly before.

The first step we took was to talk about body language and its effect on how people respond to us. We practiced walking around the room confidently, using good posture, keeping our heads up, and giving eye contact to others. Posture was also stressed in the weight room.

Next we moved on to saying no to someone with confident body posture, eye contact and a tone of voice that supported saying no. We had to spend quite a bit of time with some of the students in order to get them to be able to say no to someone with a tone of voice that sounded like they meant what they said. We added to this by brainstorming ways to say no and generated a list to be hung up in the classroom.

Finally we introduced more complete role-plays where either staff or a peer would put peer pressure on them to do something inappropriate and they would have to say no. As suggested by Blanchette and Wolfe (2002), I gave immediate feedback and if they had not demonstrated the skills correctly I would have them redo the role-plays showing the skill correctly before we would move on to the next role-play.

I looked for actual incidents I had seen the students involved in and incorporated them into the role-plays. Initially I was the only one recording incidents but as staff saw me model this they began coming to me about incidents they had observed. I would then take the notebook and record it and use it in our next skills class. After a while, they began recording their observations as well. It took a while for staff to become comfortable with participating in the role-plays. Once they saw the value of what we were doing and how directly it related to the students' needs they became willing to join in.

Once most of the students were able to use no and support it with confident body posture, eye contact, and the appropriate tone of voice, we moved on to slightly more sophisticated ways of handling peer pressure. We began learning to use fogging statements and then suggesting alternative actions as described by Fetro (2000). Fogging statements are ways of changing the subject. At this point I began using Fetro's (2000) *Observer Checklist* (p.130) to observe students during their role-plays.

Data Collection Methods

In order to record any progress made, I used the following data collecting methods:

- Personal Journal of my observations and feelings about the lessons.
- Student focus groups early on in the intervention and periodically throughout the intervention process, notes kept by me and read back to the students to confirm I had understood them correctly.
- Observation of students' interactions in the hallways by teaching partner, my paraprofessional staff, critical friends and myself.
- Record of who stays in the class and who chooses to leave during breaks and lunch hours. Done by all classroom staff.
- Record of participation kept by Phys. Ed. Leadership group
- Checklist for observing role-play from Personal and Social Skills: Level 1 (Fetro, 2000). Done by peer or myself.

Reflection and Analysis of Data

The students enjoyed doing the role-plays. They began to set up the chairs in a circle for skills class without being asked. One afternoon when I was feeling too tired to initiate the role-play activity, I asked if they would mind doing something else. They objected and insisted we carry on. They said that they would think up the role-play ideas and they did.

I was beginning to see two distinct groups developing in the class. Some of the students were catching on quickly and were able to say no a variety of ways and use both fogging statements and suggesting alternative actions with relative ease. I frequently invited them to be what we all termed the convincers. Convincers were those students who acted as the one with the bad idea putting peer pressure on the other students. They could play both roles effectively. Another group was able to say the word no repeatedly, but could not demonstrate the use of either fogging statements or suggest alternative actions. They were at a stand still.

Consistent interactions with a critical friend were a challenge. I was having a hard time meeting with my critical friend, who was also doing action research. I joined an action research group and met with them twice to discuss my project but then found that other meetings interfered with my attending any more of the action research meetings. I came to the realization that two of the paraprofessionals in my class, whom I respected, had quite naturally fallen into the role of critical friend. They were there for the role-plays, took an active part in them, and I found myself frequently discussing our progress with them. They came up with many valuable suggestions.

One of the paraprofessionals and I were feeling that the students who couldn't move beyond saying no, were not moving forward. She suggested cue cards be developed for these students. She also felt that in order to make the role-plays more real we should move out of the classroom and do them where the incidents had actually occurred. This meant moving out into the hallways, stairs and outside onto the school grounds. This was also supported by the research I had read earlier. Blanchett and Wolfe (2002) stressed the use of natural settings in order to help students transfer their knowledge.

I needed to make the use of fogging statements and suggesting alternative actions more relevant to the students who did not understand them. My general descriptions of them were not direct enough for them. I needed to make them relevant to them by individualising the statements with them.

I noticed that students, who were demonstrating the skills we had practiced very well in role-plays, were not necessarily transferring those skills to real-life situations. We continued to observe some students doing almost anything they were asked by the students they interacted with in the hallways. A new question emerged: How do I assist them with transferring what they learn to everyday situations?

On the positive side, the students themselves are noticing when someone in the class did not make a good decision and are bringing it to my attention. When we discuss real incidents as a group, they are able to come up with some excellent ideas for what that person should have done. We are able to use their ideas in our role-plays. In a focus group discussion the students agreed that doing the role-plays was something that was helping them and they wanted to continue doing role-plays. They felt that what we had been doing was helping them with walking more confidently and in saying no to people. I too, had noticed an improvement in the way they were walking in the halls. I was noticing them less because they were blending in with the crowd. This was particularly true of one student who used to walk around hunched over and would try to hide from everyone. Her behaviour only served to make her more noticeable. I had passed her a few times in the hallway after we had begun our role-playing and had almost missed noticing her because of her confident body posture.

The checklist of who left the classroom during breaks was showing that all of the students were spending at least some of their time out of the room at locker breaks and lunch hours. One student in particular who had always been very fearful of even using the bathroom during breaks, had ventured out of the room at lunchtime, sat on the stairs, and chatted with some of the female students in the hallway. One of my staff members and I believed she had overheard us discussing using the checklist. In her desire to please, she made the decision that she wanted to be seen as having left the classroom. Despite her initial reason for venturing out of the room, she found this to be a successful venture. She went to talk with the same students several more times that week.

A team of students and staff signed up for the spirit week relays held in the gym at lunchtime. While not all the students agreed to be on the team, all but one of them went

to watch the relays in the gym. This was a major step in participating in school activities. The staff supported the students' participation by joining the team or coming with students to the gym to watch.

Several staff members and I had observed that many of the students would walk through groups of people who were talking, rather than going around them. This was something they did in the classroom as well. An area that needed some attention was what I'll call crowd behaviour or the necessary manners for navigating through groups of people. At about the same time, we had been learning when to use excuse me and pardon me as part of our grammar unit in Language Arts. This was another aspect we could incorporate into our role-playing.

A couple of students leaned towards aggressiveness when saying no or feeling they needed to defend themselves against others. They were coming on too strong and needed to learn the difference between being too aggressive or passive and being assertive. Two boys also needed to tone down the way they spoke to some of their classmates. They were at times quite bossy and rude. Interestingly, they were the ones who were doing well with the role-plays. They could play the convincer well and demonstrate all the skills of resisting peer pressure.

Intervention #2

In order to improve students' use of fogging statements, I decided to use the same method we had used for ways to say no. As a group we brainstormed ideas that could be used for fogging statements. We came up with general headings such as sports, music, video games, computers, T.V. shows, movies, achievements, weather, and new places. These were written on chart paper to be displayed in the classroom and reviewed. I also stressed that a fogging statement only worked if it was really something you knew about and could talk about. If you said "How about those Bombers." but never watched football, it wouldn't work for you.

We then sat down individually with students and helped them write down fogging statements they could use. We had them name specific sports, music, and games etc. that they knew about. We then wrote down fogging statements they could use involving their individual knowledge base. The statements were written on recipe cards and put in an envelope they could keep in their binders. The cue cards were used as we performed role-plays using fogging statements. After a while most of the students began to use fogging statements spontaneously or from their cards. This process was repeated later on for suggesting alternative actions.

We began to do some of the role-plays out in the hallway, at student's lockers and out on the steps at the school entrance for an incident involving skateboarding. The students were quite excited about this next step. As we did this, we added in what to do when the hall is crowded. We stressed walking around groups whenever possible and saying excuse me before you walked through a group if you couldn't fit around them. When setting up the role-plays we would use the whole class to set up people obstacles. Students would have to navigate their way through us before reaching the

peer pressure situation. This caused the students to have to remember to use a whole series of skills as they went through the role-play.

I came across the *Choices Series* by Shay and Margaret McConnen (1992). Part of the series was a section entitled *Assertiveness*. It explained and contrasted the differences between passive, assertive, and aggressive behaviours very clearly using comic strips. We brainstormed a list of what each type of behaviour looked like and typed the descriptions up on a sheet that each student kept in their binder (Appendix B). We used the comic strips to further understand the difference. We added descriptions of the three ways of behaving to the students *Three Point Word or Concept Sheet* from *Success For All Learners* (Manitoba Education & Training, 1996) to further clarify the difference (Appendix C). While we were doing the role-plays students were asked to label the way they had behaved as passive, aggressive or assertive. I would also point out when students were using an aggressive or passive tone of voice or body posture at other times during the day.

Reflection and Analysis of Data

All the students were able to use the fogging statements and suggest alternate actions during our role-plays. Two of them need more practice to be able to do it without a long pause to look at the cue card.

I asked a focus group, “Do you think the role-plays are helping you become more assertive outside of this classroom?” These are some of their answers:

- *In my neighbourhood I used fogging statements with kids who were being mean to me. They just totally walked away.*
- *I say no to people.*
- *It is working because some people will ask me to do crazy stuff. I looked them in the eye and said it like I mean it. I used to say it more quietly. They give up quicker when I use a louder tone of voice. Then they know I'm serious, that I actually mean it.*
- *I walk more confident. I give eye contact. I say good morning to people and walk around them.*

When I asked if they wanted to continue with role-plays they said yes, but wanted to do more of it in the hallways because that made it more exciting. One student with autism very clearly told me no, she did not want to do any more role-plays. She had not been able to understand taking the role of the convincer and could not play anyone but herself. The role-plays were difficult for her because her verbal skills are the most challenging for her. However, she used all the skills we had been working on to let me know she did not want to do role-plays anymore. She repeatedly told me no when I tried wording my question differently to confirm she had understood what I had asked. She expressed her impatience when I said we would be doing some role-plays that day, by gesturing with her arms. I decided to support her efforts to stand up for herself and be assertive by allowing her to choose a different activity while the rest of us continued with the role-play. She chose to finish working on a map for geography.

The students whose actions were at times more aggressive than assertive were able to identify what they were doing aggressively and correct it when it was pointed out to them. Students who were too passive during role-plays could become more assertive when redoing the role-play when we pointed out how they were being passive. While the students can't always remember the correct words, they understand how to adjust their behaviour.

Students are now making up some of their own role-play situations. They raise topics they want to discuss and role-play. We got onto a discussion about gate night and the Halloween dance at school. Students were very thoughtful in their questions and suggestions to each other. One of the students wanted tips for how you could tell when someone was just including you and when they were making fun of you. We ended up listing characteristics for who was a friend and who was not a friend (See Appendix D). We even included whether or not you knew someone's name as a way of deciding whether or not someone was your friend. A few of my students have indicated that they believe anyone who talks to them is a friend. We need to focus some time on our Friend/Not a Friend chart.

One day one of the boys arrived at skills class and told me he had a story for me related to skills. He relayed a story of how one of the most easily convinced students in the class had resisted peer pressure. He said, "No way man." and kept on walking when a group of boys tried to get him to do something inappropriate. "Somebody even called him some swears and he just kept on walking. I told him good job." Later on, when the student involved came into the room we all congratulated him. He was able to use the skills he had learned to say no when he had the support of one of his classmates nearby. Unfortunately, this did not always apply when he was on his own.

My teaching partner told me that the students who take math with him are calling each other on their behaviour and talking about what they learned in skills class. I'm impressed that they are remembering and transferring the skills they learned when I'm not there to be the watchdog.

In order to test the transferring of their skills, I decided that I would use staff as convincers. I told the students that the role-plays would involve staff, but I would not let them know what they would be doing. I pulled the staff aside and assigned them some peer pressure roles to use on the students. I then had the students go to their lockers and role-play going to the weight room. Staff began approaching them at their lockers and put pressure on them to lend them money or give them something of theirs. The students had a much more difficult time saying no to an adult. My support staff were much more understated than the students when they role-played, so students were caught off guard. It took some of them a few minutes to remember that they were in a role-play and although they did say no, they were much more tentative than usual. I need to put more surprise into the role-plays. I told the students that we would start having sneak attacks, times when I would ask someone to approach them with a bad idea to see how they responded. I would then ask that person to report back to me and

tell me how they did. I plan to use this in my next intervention as a way to make our practice even more natural and embedded.

At a classroom staff meeting the paraprofessionals who do lunch duty commented that most of the students are out in the halls at lunchtime. The classroom is empty and they need to go out into the halls to check on how everyone is doing. This is a good indication that their comfort levels have increased.

Research Findings

Did the role-plays help my students increase their confidence and comfort level in the hallway? Yes, in many ways it did. My students continue to spend more time in the hallway at breaks and lunch times. Their comments during the focus groups showed that they are beginning to transfer the skills they are learning to some degree. Confident body posture is a skill they have all been able to incorporate. It was the first thing we learned so they have had the most practice with it.

The classroom tends to become empty once students have eaten their lunches or when break time begins. They spill out into the hallway to chat with each other and the friends they meet heading to their next class. We also have more students from outside the room sticking their heads in looking for one of my students. Comfort levels must be on the increase in order for the students to be so eager to leave the room. I now have to encourage them to come back in so we can start the next class.

They are talking about what we have been learning during classes other than skills. It seems that they are able to support each other to make good decisions when they are together. They are acting like more of a supportive community for each other. They look out for each other in the hallways and come to me if they feel someone is not making good decisions. They are doing so out of a sense of caring and concern, rather than wanting to get each other into trouble. The students whose incidents we discuss in Skills class have been open to discussing how they could have responded differently. They are comfortable and respectful of each other. This has been a welcome side effect of this action research project. Some of the improved respectfulness may have also stemmed from my asking the students their opinions about whether or not they felt the role-plays were helpful to them. Their increased involvement in deciding what we would do was modelling respectful treatment of others by me.

Some of the students continue to have difficulty when they are on their own. They still need to have reminders from staff or their peers in order to implement the skills they have learned. I see this as necessary scaffolding until they have had more practice and can do it independently. We need to continue returning to review the skills we have been working on in order to maintain the gains we have made. I plan to continue with the sneak attacks I spoke to the students about in order to have even more natural experience and practice. I have spoken to the Drama teacher and she has agreed to enlist her students to help. One of my critical friends cautioned me against contributing to the students becoming distrustful of students in the hallway again by being afraid of who would approach them. Arranging for the two classes to meet and know a little about

each other would help ease some of the tension for both groups. The time period for when this would happen will need to be defined so they don't have to fear being in the halls. The drama students will approach my students and put pressure on them to do something they shouldn't. If the students go along with the idea they should stop and let them know that it is a role-play and they should have said no. If they use the skills they've learned, they should congratulate them for a job well done. They will then report back to me on how the students responded. We will use these incidents as the basis for our role-plays along with those that occur naturally. Although we will be doing the role-plays less frequently we will continue to do them weekly or biweekly throughout the year.

Although I have always spoken to my staff about working as a team, I feel that I have come closer to treating them that way. I view two staff members as critical friends in my research. I found myself discussing what I was doing with them often and they had suggestions and questions for me. I found the input from the paraprofessionals invaluable in helping to identify areas we needed to work on. Even though I had not discussed the research I had read with my support staff, their suggestions were supported by what I had read. The use of cue cards increased the relevance to individual students. Moving the role-plays to the actual locations where the incidents had happened made the setting for the role-plays more natural.

Ethics

Students were asked if they were willing to participate in the research project. When one student did not want to continue doing role-plays she was given a choice to do something else. A permission slip went home to parents asking for their permission to include their child. If the slip was not returned data from that student was not included. Student comments during focus group discussions were read back to them to confirm that I had written down what they had said. Opinions and comments made by school staff members that were included in this report were shown to them to confirm that I had understood them correctly. I asked my teaching partner, two other teaching colleagues, and two paraprofessionals to read my report and confirm whether they agreed with my perceptions of the results.

Validity

In order to insure credibility I used six methods of data collection so I would have more than one way of confirming the results of the intervention. I have confirmed the accuracy of what I have written about others comments to me by asking them to read what I have written. While I struggled with finding a consistent critical friend, I spoke to the action research group about my project, discussed it in class with my university classmates and ultimately used paraprofessionals in my program and three teacher colleagues to give me feedback on my project before finalising it.

I have tried to give enough information about the setting in which the research took place and the interventions used to make it possible for teachers in similar situations to generalize my project. I have listed the materials used, included samples of charts generated with the students and the parent permission form.

I plan to share my project with other teachers of special needs children in my school division. We meet for breakfast about once a month and I look forward to talking about the changes in my students and myself.

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Appendix A
Mrs Hill's Action Research Project

I am currently enrolled in a class on Action Research with the University of Manitoba. Action Research in education involves teachers critically looking at their practice, asking questions about what they do and working towards improving their teaching.

The focus of my Action Research project is on ways to increase my students' confidence and independence in the hallways at school. I am hoping that this will lead to greater inclusion in the school as a whole. Initially I noticed many of my students were both afraid and uncomfortable out of our classroom or were at times victims of bad judgement.

After reading research on teaching social and relationship skills I decided to try role-play to teach my students to look and feel more confident in the hallways. In order to measure the effectiveness of this intervention I am recording my observations of the role-plays we do in the classroom, students' hallway behaviour, how often they chose an activity outside of the classroom, student focus group comments and my own journal entries. I will be submitting my findings to my professor and they may be published in our divisional teacher's journal. Students' names will not be used and their identities will remain confidential

If you have any questions regarding this project please feel free to call me at 339-2058. If you do not wish me to include data about your child in the findings please let me know and I will exclude any information regarding them from the data collection. The students will still participate in the skills class and role-plays.

Sincerely,
Janice Hill

Student Name _____

_____ I agree to have data from my child included in the action research project on using role-play.

_____ I do not wish to have data from my child included in the action research project on using role-play.

Date _____ Parent Signature _____

Appendix B

Ways of Behaving

Assertive	Passive	Aggressive
<p>Stand up for their rights Strong Firm but polite Confident body language Say NO and tell you why they are saying no Use Fogging Statements (Change the Subject) Use Alternative Action statements (Come up with a different idea of what to do) Ask for help when they need it</p>	<p>Goes along with what others want to do Don't tell people what they want Shy Not strong enough to say no Scared Nervous Upset Worried about what others think Keep their head down No eye contact</p>	<p>Use a mad tone of voice Demanding Ticked off Threaten others Bully Try to make you feel guilty if you don't do what they want Pick on people Name call Insult people Swear Aggressive body language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • glare or stare at you • invade your space, get too close • pound on things </p>

Appendix C
Three-Point Approach for Words and Concepts

Definition <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Word or Concept <hr/> Synonym/Example	Diagram
Definition <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Word or Concept <hr/> Synonym/Example	Diagram
Definition <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Word or Concept <hr/> Synonym/Example	Diagram
Definition <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Word or Concept <hr/> Synonym/Example	Diagram

Appendix D

Friend	Not a Friend
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know things about them • Help each other • Respect each other • Accept No • Greet you • Happy to see you • Doesn't put you down • Enjoys spending time with you • You can joke around with them • Know their interests • Make you feel happy • Won't try to hurt you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know their name • Not respectful to you • Rude • Obnoxious • Push your buttons • Try to bug and upset you • Puts you down • Tries to embarrass you • Makes you feel uncomfortable • Makes you angry • Try to get you into trouble

MENOMINEE STORYTELLING: A VEHICLE FOR ENHANCING LITERACY LEARNING

Cathleen C. March

Abstract

The ancient art of storytelling can bridge cultural gaps in the diversified classrooms of many schools as it helps to expand the vocabulary and concepts of young listeners. Use of familiar and traditional stories ground children in an informed context that serves as a foundation for literacy learning. Stories are a natural vehicle for enhancing language skills and appreciating cultural differences. When stories have a multicultural focus, they have the power to coalesce children with their own culture and lineage and truths. Stories from oral cultures, specifically from the Native American Menominee people, are illustrated in this article as a means of linking children to familiar story grammars in an effort to enhance literacy learning.

Oral Tradition

All tribes and civilizations have an oral tradition whereby stories, culture, and history are passed down from generation to generation. There are approximately 500 different Native American tribes and 200 Native American languages in the Western Hemisphere today. Because few of these societies developed a written language, they typically relied upon sharing customs and traditions by word of mouth. In this fashion, they ensured that their children were made aware of past events and the impact of these events upon lives both present and future. The Menominee Nation is one of strong oral tradition that favors sharing history through storytelling.

The Wolf River Region, located in northeastern Wisconsin, is home to most of the 8,000 Menominee people. Known as “the gatherers of wild rice” due to their early dependence upon this food staple, tribal members maintain many of their 5,000-year-old traditions even as they blend into the society of today. Their reservation, set aside for the Menominee people in an 1854 treaty, grows lush with 235,000 acres of woodlands and lakes. A lumber mill and a casino on these grounds provide for local employment and are the economic backbone of the community.

Children from the reservation attend a public school housed within this territory. The core curricula of the kindergarten through grade twelve institution adhere to the same state and federal standards, as do all Wisconsin Public Schools. Beyond the education provided by the government, young Menominee people are included in family gatherings, ceremonies, rites, powwows, and neighborhood meetings. These all provide ample opportunity to perpetuate the oral traditions of the Menominee. It is most common for the elders to tell the tales as younger members listen with rapt attention to the familiar stories that outline their heritage. Those residing in areas other than the reservation are often privileged to hear the stories of their ancestors as parents frequently share the culture with youngsters.

Rationale for Storytelling

Many educators believe that listening to stories is the gateway to life-long learning. Storytelling may well be the most successful teaching tool of all time. For centuries storytelling was the predominant method of preserving ancestral data for all cultures. Stories are a natural vehicle for enhancing children's oral language skills. As well, they can teach morals, traditions, and values (Honeyghan, 2000). They may also serve as an expansive link to history and can address biases and stereotyping pertaining to cultures (Bruce, 2003). Recently, the bells and whistles of technology seemingly have contributed to a diminished emphasis on storytelling. Some educators have lost touch with this personalized method of increasing literacy. Research has renewed an awareness of the value of this teaching tool (Woodard, 2002). Strickland (1989) advocates storytelling as a vehicle for fostering growth in language by providing rich models and exposing learners to "book language". Cooper and Kreiger (2003) state that all aspects of a literacy program must account for oral language, prior knowledge, and background experiences.

When stories have a multicultural focus, participants are furnished with opportunities to develop an appreciation of cultural similarities and differences (St. Amour: 2003). Society and experience shape children's worldviews. Native American children, often rich in oralcy skills, may lack literacy skills important for success in today's schools. To assure optimal learning experiences for all, educators must be vigilant in developing programs to bridge the gap between literacy practices in the home and literacy practices in the schools. Using stories that are familiar and germane to an individual's background experiences offers a rich and meaningful text. Thus, including the stories of children's cultures, enriches the curricula.

Meaning Based Learning

"Meaning based" is a key phrase in the persuasion to include familiar stories in classroom curricula, particularly because these stories differ from child to child and culture to culture. All children should have some familiarity with issues faced in classrooms; thus schema building is essential if learning is to benefit all students. It is well known that learners do best when new material is grounded in past learning. All children bring rich literacy contexts to the educational setting. It is the responsibility of the educator to detect the strengths and backgrounds represented in a classroom so they may be woven into the context of the school's curricula.

The foundations of literacy learning are former experiences and oral language facility. Accounting for these elements is imperative if the literacy program is to be successful (Cooper, 2003). The challenge is to develop strategies to address the needs of students from all cultures.

Children residing on Native American Reservations often find classroom stories, basal reader offerings, and other textual sources difficult to follow because they have little prior knowledge for the vocabulary, ideas, and concepts in these texts. Although their

repertoire may be very rich in story grammars indigenous to their own tribes, they often lack elements of the cultural literacy in texts commonly used in the classrooms of today. Early literacy in traditional school settings is often based upon fairy tales and nursery rhymes that children in urban and suburban settings often find familiar. When Native American stories are included in classrooms and library story hours, cultural gaps can be bridged in a pleasant and focused fashion as they level the playing field for all participants.

Oral Tradition in the Menominee Nation

It is implicit in the Menominee oral tradition that power is in the spoken word. This does not mean the stories themselves are sacred. Instead, the telling of them results in recollections of the collective memories and wisdom of deceased relatives. Storytelling in the Menominee tradition is a valued skill and is naturally informative. The act of storytelling is the domain of the elders with both males and females participating. Frequently, these stories illustrate consequences of behaviors (Hodge, 2002). No summation is given to the stories as they are told because it is believed that each individual must determine the personal meaning of the story as it fits into his or her life.

When Native American children are urged to listen and relate to familiar stories, the richness of their heritage can be shared with other children in the group. Teachers and librarians can use these tales in the core curricula, thus bringing the child's background schema into the learning situation. This enables literacy instruction to be differentiated to meet the diverse needs of all students. Menominee youngsters may listen to the often familiar story of Mani Boyd, a story that follows in this text, and learn more about their own traditions, the moral codes of their people, and the importance of sharing the culture of the Menominee tribe while at the same time develop listening skills and story grammars essential for optimal literacy learning.

Storytelling Can Provide A Social Context For Literacy Learning

The story of the beginnings of the Menominee Nation can provide a rich setting for literate behaviors. The exposure to "book language" in storytelling has a direct effect on reading development (Strickland, 1989). Honeyghan (2000) states that family and community literacy can be a useful tool in helping children learn a range of literate practices.

The varied narrative styles of culturally diverse children can be addressed by selecting teaching strategies that emphasize the important role language plays in conveying information. Just viewing a storyteller engaging an audience can expand the range of perspectives of a child. Changing intonation and voice as well as varying facial expression and body language expose children to views beyond those of immediate family (Craig, et al, 2000). Family discourse style defines worldview for the child. Using this concept as a template for widening knowledge bases, the storyteller can expand and enhance prior learning with the result that home and school discourse rules are integrated.

Educational Gains From Storytelling

Storytelling offers a model for language learners to strengthen meaning vocabulary to enhance their literacy learning. The art of storytelling can make a story more vivid as the postures, gestures, voice tones, and personal connection between storyteller and listener add dimension to the text.

Cooper and Kiger (2003) encourage teachers and librarians to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of each student. The study of family and community literacy is a rapidly expanding field of research where many findings suggest that using the cultural backgrounds of select youngsters provides a rich educational foundation that is full of meaning for them while at the same time augmenting the understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures to others in the group. Stories can ignite imaginations, evoke empathy as listeners identify with characters and events, and can serve as instruments for discussion that can lead to higher level thinking skills such as comparing and contrasting happenings to events in daily life.

Providing Native American students with a traditional context ensures a familiarity with the text, thus eliminating translation problems and freeing teachers and librarians to focus upon other skills and knowledges. Educators who dedicate portions of the curricula to reflect upon students' backgrounds can transform literacy events for minority groups. When children are encouraged to transfer their family literacy backgrounds to school-based practices, the significance of new learning can be maximized.

Five Steps for Storytelling in the Classroom and Library

1. Selection of the story
2. Repeated readings of the story
3. Activation of schema and background building for listeners
4. The storytelling act
5. Enhancing the learning

The first step in successful classroom and library-oriented storytelling is the selection of the tale to be told. It is important, if one wishes to enhance the historical aspects of a culture, to opt for stories that depict Native Americans in an authentic and historically accurate setting. The learning experience is improved when cultures are represented with factual evidence. Too frequently, non-Native American writers who contribute to this bank of stories are not familiar with, or do not adhere to, accurate historical details. Thus, selection should include a check on the authenticity of the time and place settings and the accuracy of the elements of the story.

Once the story is designated, storytellers need to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the content. This second step includes repeated readings to enhance awareness of the story content. It is a misconception that a story must be memorized word for word. Instead, storytellers should familiarize themselves with the general sequence of events and the salient points included in the text so the tale can be told in a natural and

uncluttered fashion (Sutherland, 1997).

Employing pre-listening strategies to activate schema and set a purpose for the listening experience is the third step in storytelling. This is essential to ensure that listeners are familiar with concepts and vocabulary inherent in the tale as comprehension is dramatically affected by background knowledge.

Step four is the actual telling of the story. The primary focus of the storyteller is to evoke mental images of the story that provide the listener with the tools to see, hear and feel the events of the story. Utilizing body language, gesture, facial expression, and eye contact can enhance the meaning of the story and enrich the listening experience.

Step five is the expansion of the story, allowing listeners to connect the story to real life experiences and to make connections with history. Creative storytellers can embellish what has been shared through a variety of creative measures that link to the classroom curricula or to the lives of the listeners.

Two stories follow, with suggestions for pre-listening and post-listening activities that may enhance the learning experience for the listeners. Please remember: the allure of storytelling is important to the lesson, so have fun in the telling.

Story I: "The Naming Ceremony of Mani"

Introduction

The ritual that offers a tribal name to a Menominee youngster is a poignant example of the Menominee oral tradition. Menominee people are customarily given their names as young children. The occasion of name-giving includes a feast with both tribal and family members in attendance. Elders select a name for a child by revisiting dreams or visions that occurred prior to the ceremony. It has been believed that a good name can alter or strengthen a person's karma, thus great care is taken in the selection. At the time of the naming, a selected elder lays hands upon the child and pronounces the new name in unison with others. A discussion of the origins and meaning of the name ensues (Teller, 1985).

Pre-listening activities

The "Naming Ceremony of Mani" lends itself well to storytelling proceedings as the story follows a defined sequence and the events are relatively easy to remember. Pre-listening strategies and activities should include a discussion of words that may be unfamiliar to the listeners. The selection of these words will vary from group to group, depending upon the age and level of sophistication of the children. The introduction of three to five words is suggested and could include "Mani", "karma", "swoop", and "feast".

Prior to the storytelling, links can be made to the historical and geographical issues connected with actual names of children in the group. With very small children, discussion prior to the listening event could include a focus on the names and meanings

of names of those in the classroom. Older children may enjoy learning of the geographical sources for each child's name, and the derivation of the meaning of each name. A baby-naming book is useful for these purposes. A map that allows the children to locate the country of their name's origin could be displayed, with pins depicting the countries represented in the class.

Following the introduction of key vocabulary words and activation of the schema, the story can be told. Setting a purpose for the listening will focus children's attention on important aspects of the story. The teacher or librarian can ask children to attend to the impact of Mani's names on his behavior. The story is adapted from an unpublished manuscript by L. Teller (1985).

The story

There are times when one name is insufficient for one individual. Mani Boyd received more than one name during his lifetime. Listen and you will hear the wisdom of the elders as they search seek the best name for Mani.

Not so long ago, on the Menominee Reservation in Wisconsin, there was great excitement among members of the tribe. On a clear and sunny day a tiny new addition to the Boyd family entered this world. The baby's eyes were as sparkling and bright as the currant berries that grew near the woodland. His hair was as silky and black and shiny as the feathers of the raven that flew over the forests and plains. This new little one captivated all who met him with his engaging smile and endearing baby ways. How he was loved by his family and fellow tribal members! His birth was a promise for their future. All hoped that he would carry on traditions of preserving the environment and living in harmony with the peoples of the world.

The baby's family called him "Mani," but a day soon came when this newest little Menominee became the focus of the tribal rite of the "Naming Ceremony." On this important day, the elders gathered round the sweet and smiling child. A great feast had been prepared and nearly all of the tribal members were in attendance for this notable event.

The elders knew that the selection of a name influences life's pathway and strengthens the karma for the recipient. They needed to approach the naming task with the greatest of care. Singly, and deep in thought, the elders revisited their dreams and visions. They then collaborated with one another for a very long time. What was the best name for this child?

At last a name was selected. One elder laid his hand upon the child and pronounced his new name, the Menominee word for "lumberjack bird." In unison, those in attendance intoned the new name, "Lumberjack Bird, Lumberjack Bird, Lumberjack Bird." All then listened as an elder discussed its origin and meaning.

There are times when one name is insufficient for one individual. This was the situation for Mani Boyd. Although the lumberjack bird had the qualities of strength, endurance,

and intelligence, it was also known to steal. Lumberjack Bird was also a bit scary, as he would swoop into a camp unannounced and frighten the unsuspecting people dwelling there. As Mani approached manhood, his demeanor was often objectionable to the tribe. He was not always careful of the possessions of others and he would often startle his fellow tribal members by appearing suddenly out of nowhere.

The elders, aware of Mani's misbehaviors, decided to meet once again. Their mission this time was to decide upon another name that would influence Mani's behaviors in a more positive fashion and lead him toward an honest and dependable life style.

After much pondering, the decision was made to give him the name Napus. The Menominee translation of Napus is "lead rabbit." The elders regarded Napus as the Spirit who leads young people to wisdom.

Happily, the adolescent Mani was guided away from the error of his former days. With his new name he became a leader among his people. His adult life was spent in a position of respected elder. He also became a persuasive speaker for members of his nation (adapted from Teller, 1985).

Post-listening activities

Post-listening strategies are designed to reinforce the learning that has gone on. Discussion following this story can open many learning avenues as it reinforces the comprehension of the listening act. A language experience chart could be used to revisit the flow of events and to assure listeners' familiarity with the story.

Both emerging and more sophisticated learners can benefit from retelling the story. Initially pairing the children, providing them with just one listener, then expanding to include a larger audience can accomplish this. Children can also collaboratively construct a "Reader's Theater" version of the text and share it with students from another class or grade. As well, listeners should have at their disposal a basket of books that relate to the geography, history, and Native American issues discussed in the story so they may read independently.

Incorporating art activities serves as an excellent reinforcement for storytelling. Drawing the sequence of events in the story can make a visual display that serves as a reminder of the story events and can allow children to practice sequencing skills.

Story 2:"A Menominee Creation Story"

Introduction

All Native American tribes have their own creation story that is of utmost importance in explaining the heritage and ways of the people. Menominee children are all familiar with the following legend that outlines the genesis of the Menominee Nation.

Pre-listening Activities

The concept of a creation story should be presented to the listeners. Throughout the ages people living in forests and jungles, deserts and mountains, and islands and plains

have asked: “Who made the world?” “How did plants and animals arrive to fill the seas and the lands?” “Why do the seasons follow one another?” “Why is the sky full of stars?”. Sharing the same curiosity, the heritage of the Menominees outlines creation with this creation story.

The Story

“We begin at the beginning. This is the story of the origin of the Menominee and our organization of the cosmos. It is said that the Menominee people descend from a Great Bear who sprang from the earth and became a fair skinned man. He was alone until he called the Eagle to join him. Eagle then became human. Soon, all the other animals observed these new mortals and they, too, took on human form.

Yet, all was not well with this world. The evil Underground Spirits did not like what was happening. Their importance in the cosmos was indeed threatened by these new beings. They set out to destroy the newly formed humans.

The Creator did not want the newly defined humans to fall prey to the murderous Underground Spirits. He sent Thunderbird to protect them. All was well for some time, but all too soon the Underground Spirits grew so powerful that, mighty as he was, Thunderbird could no longer force them to recede.

In desperation the Menominee sent their best young men to the wilderness to fast and to pray for help. As these young men deprived themselves of food, they offered their pain as a gift to the creator. They rubbed dirt on their faces, believing that they were harvesting strength from the earth. They beseeched the creator to grant them the strength to overcome the evil of the Underground Spirits.

Soon, the young men decided to separate. Each set out alone to observe nature while praying for the safety of their fellow humans. After some time had passed, they began to return to the camp. One by one, upon their reentry, they began to recount the same vision: Each saw a grandfather in the four directions. This ancestor spoke to each young man and told him to go back and tell his people what he had seen. The old one instructed them not to worry, but to know that the Spirits of the four directions would be sent to help the people. Thereafter, the Menominee have paid homage to the Guardian Spirits of the four directions.

With great joy, the brave young men returned to their people. They reported that the mighty spirits of the North, South, East, and West would offer protection and guidance for the Menominee people. Thereafter, the tribe has paid loyal homage to the Guardian Spirits of the Four Directions (adapted from L. Teller, 1985).

Post-listening Activities

Retelling the story is again a valuable learning experience. This story lends itself well to the felt board retelling practice. The storyteller should model the initial retelling, using the felt props discussed below, then encourage the children to engage in their own versions of revisiting this creation story.

A board covered with flannel or felt material is needed for this activity. Characters, cut out of felt, should include a bear that is sufficiently large enough to be superimposed upon a "fair-skinned man" replica, also cut from felt. Similarly, an eagle needs to be cut larger than another human form. Evil Underground Spirits may be represented with a large and colorful piece of felt while a string of connected dolls may portray the humans that descended from other animals. Felt letters "N," "S," "E," and "W" could be used to depict the four directions while small felt circles portray the grandfathers. Given time to practice, some children may wish to share the tale with others in the school. To encourage retelling in the home, small replicas of the flannel board and figures can be made and transported from school to home for additional storytelling practice.

The directional concepts of North, South, East, and West can be discussed then reinforced by viewing varied map legends. Children can be afforded opportunity to draw their own maps that show the use of these directions.

Again, a basket of books related to the story should be made available for use during free time. Some students may wish to research creation stories of other tribes and countries.

Conclusion

The Menominee Nation has celebrated the power of story for many generations. We can learn from the richness of their tales as we interlace these stories into the core curricula.

Words are alive, and storytellers can make them more captivating and energizing through expression and gesture. The renewed awareness of the benefits of storytelling has been recognized as an important teaching tool. Motivation is an important aspect of language learning. We know that stories can be informative and enriching, but most of all they can be fun. Please remember to enjoy yourself as you bring the magic of story to young listeners.

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My deepest gratitude is extended to Dr. Lauren Waukau-Villagomez who heightened my awareness of the need for authenticity of the rich lore that is an integral part of the Menominee heritage and to its importance in increasing the literacy skills of Native American children.

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BE A TEACHER – CHANGE THE WORLD

John K. Collins

I know what you are thinking.

You are thinking:

I work over 50 hours a week. I have no social life. My spouse and children must make appointments to see me.

I am a classroom manager, a psychiatrist, a counsellor, a negotiator, a diplomat, a social worker, a record keeper, a curriculum developer, and a paramedic.

I tie their shoelaces, hunt their lice and counsel their parents... and somewhere in the midst of all this, I also teach.

And now in the few minutes I have left to myself, you want me to change the world.

Well, I am happy to tell you that changing the world will not require any extra time from you. The very purpose of teaching is to change the world. Teaching is a political act and our society intended it to be a political act.

Thomas Jefferson wrote: *“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be.”*

Egerton Ryerson, regarded as the founder of public school education in Canada, wrote: *“Education among the people is the best security of good government and constitutional liberty.”*

John Ralston Saul tells us that: *“Public education is the single most important element in the maintenance of a democratic system.”*

Closer to home, the Manitoba Public Schools Act, speaking for the people of Manitoba, declares that: *“...a strong public system is a fundamental element of a democratic society...public schools should contribute to the development of a fair, compassionate, healthy and prosperous society.”*

And right here at home, the Seven Oaks Mission Statement describes this school division as *“...a community of learners every one 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.”*

Just by teaching in the public schools you are making a political statement. You are saying that education is not the privilege of the rich alone but that every child, rich or

poor, of whatever creed or colour, is entitled to the knowledge and skills necessary to success in life.

In science, you are teaching of the unending search for truth and the vulnerability of our environment. In social studies you are explaining the complex relationship between politics and economics. When you teach language, you are demonstrating that clear thinking depends on understanding how language defines our very view of life. When you integrate special needs students into your classroom, you are living the promise of the charter of rights and freedoms that, here in Canada: *“Every individual is equal.”*

In your classroom, in the gymnasium, in the counsellor’s office, in the school corridors, on the playground - whenever you denounce bullying, you are teaching that violence undermines the dignity and value of every human being. Whatever the subject or grade, every teacher by word and deed is teaching – as James Baldwin wrote – that: *“There is only one race and we are all part of it.”*

The writer, Graham Greene, said *“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”* And for most children, when that moment comes, a teacher is there. Because you change the children, you change the world.

Those of you who have been teaching for some time should well know that there are people out there in all walks of life leading fulfilled lives who would not otherwise have made it had it not been for you.

Every day, teachers inspire students

- To be critical thinkers,
- To be cooperative,
- To substitute reason for violence,
- To admire selflessness,
- To look forward to participating fully as citizens of a country governed by the people for the people.

Teachers more than anybody are trying to create the world desired by Jefferson and Saul and described in *the Manitoba Public Schools Act*. However, today, this is more difficult for you than ever it was for teachers in the past. Since the establishment of the public schools in the 19th century, the values of society have been the values of the schools. What the teachers taught in the schools was reinforced by the parents and the leading institutions of society.

Today, for the first time in history, the values of the schools and society are being challenged by a powerful force. A force that Pierre Elliot Trudeau described as *“Media controlled by the power of money”*. Popular culture has been enlisted in a campaign by big business to devalue civic morality and replace it with shallow consumerism. Relentlessly, the corporate media attempts to convince children and adults alike that

they are no longer citizens of a democracy but are rather consumers in a consumer society.

Early in the last century, Theodore Roosevelt warned that if the people did not control the corporations, the corporations would control the people. In the past 50 years, the capitalist system has progressed from providing the western world with an unprecedented standard of living to unleashing the monstrous idea that the sole purpose of life is non-stop consumption. What our grandparents saw as merely a chore – *going to the store once in a while to buy necessities* - has become a public passion. In 1940, during the Second World War, Winston Churchill asked the British for blood, toil, tears and sweat. In 2001, when terrorists murdered 3,000 people at the World Trade Centre, President Bush exhorted the American people to do their bit to defeat the terrorists by going shopping.

If you can indoctrinate a person as a child, you can control him or her for life – On that assumption, business deliberately targets our students with the message that material things are the only source of happiness and fulfillment. Apart from living in an environment saturated with advertising, children see about 20,000 television commercials a year, many tailor-made to take advantage of their inexperience. Young children have difficulty distinguishing between television programs, commercials and reality. What chance have they got to develop independent values when billions of dollars are spent by advertisers on writers, technicians, psychiatrists, and focus groups to determine what words and images are most likely to indoctrinate them?

The values our children are exposed to outside of school go beyond being persuaded that MP3s and cell phones that take photographs are necessities of life. They squarely contradict the provincial goal of a fair, compassionate and healthy society. They mock this school division's goal of producing graduates who will find fulfillment as moral, contributing members of society. They ridicule the values you teach by word and deed every day. The so-called values preached by the corporations aptly fit on a bumper sticker: "*Who dies with the most toys wins.*" They preach that the rich are risk-takers who deserve to be rich, the poor are losers who deserve to be laughed at as "trailer park trash."

They preach:

- that schools should be run like businesses
- that taxes are robbery.
- that fascination with the trivia of celebrity life is cool.
- that interest in public affairs is boring.
- that organized labour is bad.
- that organized money is good.
- that serfdom is ok for workers in Asia as long as it keeps prices down.

The result is to make a few people obscenely rich while keeping most people poor.

Recently, a model, Kate Moss, made headlines when she was seen sniffing cocaine.

One newspaper made the point that even if she lost some contracts, she would not suffer because she is worth about 60 million dollars. That's money earned from no talent other than walking around a stage wearing designer clothing. To get an idea of what this says about the values of the business world, Kate Moss's income would be more than enough to run the Seven Oaks School Division for a full year. Another way of looking at it would be that it would take a teacher something over a thousand years to earn what Kate Moss has earned in about ten. The funny thing is, I can't recall anybody saying that wearing designer clothing is the single most important element in the maintenance of a democratic system, Or that a nation that expects to be badly dressed and free expects what never was and never will be. It is not just that the media offer self-absorbed celebrities up to our students as heroes, it is that the media render true heroes invisible - true heroes like those in Winnipeg's inner city who help the unemployed, save children from gangs, and feed the poor, often at risk to their lives. It is not just that the media drown children in trivia; it is that it starves them of significant ideas. It is that the media convinces our students that it is more important to obsess over whether Brad Pitt will marry Michael Jackson or whether Tom Cruise is pregnant than to care that a family is starving in Africa because of subsidies to European and American factory farms or that a child lives chained to an assembly line somewhere in Asia so that shoes can be sold in Winnipeg at a profit.

The most important question facing teachers today is: How can our students live moral, humane lives in a world dominated by selfish consumerism? What is to be done?

First, we must examine whether the school as it is presently structured is a suitable instrument to confront the power of the commercial media. A typical school today does not look much different from a typical school in 1905. A few offices, a gymnasium and many classrooms. Of course, what goes on in those classrooms is a mixture of skill, creativity and innovation beyond the wildest dreams of the teachers of 1905. Yet, in the 1990s, a Canadian teachers' federation study on teacher work life found that

- 50% of teachers were exhausted at the end of the instructional day,
- 60% felt unable to influence decisions affecting their teaching,
- 40% had too heavy a workload to do the job well, and
- 74% did not have the time to help students having difficulty.

Almost half had such a heavy workload they couldn't do their job properly. Three quarters did not have time to help students in difficulty. That's hardly a description of an effective system. It's certainly not a description of a healthy system.

The problem must be caused by either the people or the system. The most important people in the system are the teachers. Education reformers are always trying to fix the teachers, but what if the teachers are not the problem? Teachers, as a group, are highly skilled, well qualified, and unusually dedicated to their work. Contrary to the impression given by the media, international studies demonstrate that the quality of teaching in Canada is among the best in the world. Incidentally, speaking of the quality of teachers, the renowned education philosopher, Professor Gary Fenstermacher, had this to say of the teachers of this school division a few years ago: *"In Seven Oaks, one sees colleagues wanting to make better schools for a better world. There is a moral*

sensitivity here, a view of what education can be when pursued with all the energy and hope that can be mustered of its behalf.” The problem is not the teachers.

If the problem is not the teachers, then we must look to the system. The general structure of schools – a series of classrooms with one teacher per classroom - either teaching children by age-range or teaching a specific piece of the curriculum - would be familiar to a teacher from 1905. But nothing else in the world today would be. Some fellow with a lot of time on his hands has calculated that the last two generations have seen more change than the planet's first 798 human generations put together. We can all list the changes that have taken place in the past fifty years - changes in technology, communications, medicine and transportation - from heart transplants to genetic engineering, from the train to the space shuttle, from the radio to the internet, from a good, loud shout to the cell phone. Suffice to say, the world of our parents and grandparents is gone and it is futile to deploy the solutions of our parents and grandparents against the challenges of today. But - flags flying and lances at the ready, teachers are bravely charging on horseback against the jet fighters of the consumer society. We must face the possibility that perhaps there is a fundamental mismatch between the structure of the 19th century school and the kind of education needed by the students of the 21st century.

A lack of time seems to be the bane of teachers' lives. Perhaps the time to help students having difficulty and the time to teach without being exhausted at the end of the day could be found if the school were organized to fit the job rather having teachers and students squeezed into a schedule to fit an obsolete school organization. To meet the challenges of today, a school needs to harness the full potential of all the staff. How can this be done when most teachers are confined one by one to individual classrooms, like workers on an assembly line, unable to consult with colleagues as teaching is in progress, unable to take a moment out to let off steam when situations try their patience, unable even to go to the washroom until recess. In most other professional enterprises, the practitioners are free, even encouraged, to consult as they work. This helps to refine ideas and avoid mistakes. Teachers and trustees should be asking themselves what a school would look like today if they had to design one from scratch. If teachers could ask themselves how should a school look, how should a school be organized, how should a school be managed so that we could overcome the obstacles to good teaching and overcome them without being exhausted or burned out, the result might be very different from what we take for granted today. I include trustees deliberately because the Seven Oaks School Division has been a leader among Manitoba school divisions in encouraging teachers to think critically about the nature of teaching and the moral grounding of what takes place in the classroom.

As well, the question of the role of the classroom teacher within the school must also be addressed. The C.T.F. Study found that most teachers are not involved in decisions crucial to them yet they are the only people who actually teach the kids.

Professor Fenstermacher has written: *“No argument of which I am aware establishes that the successful performance of classroom teaching demands less skill, training,*

exercise of intelligence and competence than the successful performance of any other professional role in the institution of formal learning.” Various Canadian commentators have described teachers as *“The stitching that holds the educational cloth of society together,”* and the classroom interaction between teachers and students has been called: *“The primary act of education.”* Yet the reality is that, of all the professionals in the public school system, the teacher has the least power and -not incidentally - gets the least pay.

Manitoba regulation 468/88 specifies that the principal is in charge of the school in all matters of organization, management, discipline and instruction. That doesn't leave much for the classroom teacher to be in charge of. In fact, it is a perfect description of the command and control model suited to schools of the 19th century when, typically, teachers had little more education than their students. It is hardly suited to the 21st century when the typical teacher today often has two degrees and five years of university education. This is not to say that many principals do not run their schools in a genuinely collegial manner that respects the professionalism of their teachers. But they do so out of the goodness of their hearts and not because of any professional rights vested in the teachers.

In a position paper of a few years ago, the Manitoba Teachers' Society declared its belief that: *“Schools will change for the better only when teachers move from the bottom of the educational hierarchy to their rightful place as independent professionals.”* It's not hard to do. All it requires is changing a couple of words in the regulation to read: *“Teachers are in charge of the school in all matters of organization, management, discipline and instruction.”*

One way or another change will happen. If it is not teacher-driven, it will be top-down - imposed as usual by people far from the classroom. Private enterprise is gradually moving into the operation of schools and introducing reforms based on union busting, reduced salaries, unlimited workload, and abolishing job security. Not to be outdone, governments are introducing reforms based on restrictive curricula, standardized testing, and of course, unlimited workload and abolishing job security. Teachers can do better than that.

Is it a pipe dream? No. More than most, teachers must believe that the idealism of today is the realism of tomorrow. You are all members of the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Seven Oaks Teachers' Association and these organizations are never more effective than when their members are actively working for a common goal and particularly if that goal is to improve teacher conditions where it really counts - within the schools. The society and your association have a history of doing the impossible. Fifteen years ago it was considered a pipe dream to have any limits on teacher workload in the collective agreement. Today, in Seven Oaks, teachers take for granted articles like voluntary extracurricular activities, duty free noon hour, and limits on contact time, not to mention fully paid maternity and paternity leave.

The moral, civic and environmental problems caused by unregulated capitalism can be resolved only through political action. It is your students who will become the adults who must win back a world where they will be not consumers but citizens, and where they will live not in a consumer society but in a moral community. If ignorance and the miseries it causes cannot be defeated in our schools, they can be defeated nowhere.

The school is the only place left where history teaches that we are all brothers and sisters, where science teaches the test of truth, and where language is the servant not of propaganda but of clear thinking. The public schools remain our society's single most significant affirmation of our faith in a better future.

Teachers have already made the quality of life in Canada one of the best in the world. You will succeed again. Be guided by the words of the greatest teacher in western history. Socrates said: *"I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think."* That's good enough. Only make your students think. *They* will change the world for you.

October 20, 2005