

# aviso



The Magazine for Nova Scotia's Teaching Profession  
La revue de la profession enseignante en Nouvelle-Écosse

Fall 2017

# Agency Power Sustainability





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AVISO | FALL 2017

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# *From the Editorial Team*

## **Just in case you ever wondered...**

*Natalie MacIsaac*

**I'm a bit like that kid who likes to take things apart to figure out how they work.** Except for me, those engines and machines are words. To those who know me, it's probably not a big surprise that I often encourage the students in my English classes to look at the parts of a word they aren't familiar with to see if they can figure out what it might mean.

*"What does the prefix omni- mean and how can we apply it to the context in which this word is used?"*

*I've asked that question more than once.*

NSTU Past President Shelley Morse suggested that I put my name forward to be considered for the *aviso* Content Editorial Team. As a self-professed Word Nerd, I was flattered; I embraced the opportunity to put my English teacher skills and my enjoyment of exploring and connecting ideas to good use. Though I'm only two meetings deep, I was inspired to write this piece, and I thrive on sharing and creating with the team.

I have seen and read editions of *aviso* for years. *aviso* has gone through many changes and challenges. Last year there was only one edition published due to Work-to-Rule. The magazine is now published online in an attempt to be environmentally and fiscally responsible. Since joining the Editorial Team, the part of me that is still **that kid** wanted to look into **why** our magazine is called *aviso*. According to Oxford Dictionaries, the word *aviso* is a noun: historically, "a dispatch boat, an advice boat." In the late 16th century, the Spanish *aviso* meant "advise, intelligence, dispatch-boat, advice boat from Middle French

*avis*." The NSTU website tells me that "*aviso*, the magazine for Nova Scotia's teaching profession, is published three times per year – fall, winter, and spring." I asked Angela Murray, our Coordinator of Public Relations and Communications at the NSTU, for a little help. A memo from 1985 indicated the magazine for Nova Scotia's teaching profession would be called *aviso*, meaning "a collection of thoughtful ideas and advice." The way I see it, our *aviso* magazine is a place where WE collect and share ideas, experiences and advice. This publication allows us access to information we might not otherwise read or write. The information we publish comes from places of inquiry, practice and passion. *Aviso*: I think our metaphorical boat has a title that fits nicely.

Here's the thing: we all have stories to share, advice to give, and intelligence to impart. What can you learn from the articles written by others in our profession? Check out the themes for the upcoming publications and consider submitting an article to our magazine. I have a feeling you have something to share that will help others to reflect and create.

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**Natalie MacIsaac is a teacher at Horton High School, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board**



# Engaging Transformative Learning at NSCC

*Deborah A. McVeigh*

**L**earning never ends for educators. We are always improving ourselves by looking for new ideas and practices by furthering our education. **Fred Tilley** – principal, academic chair, faculty, school board member, and accountant are some of the roles held by Fred so far in his career. He describes his most recent educational achievement and shares with us his research.

**Q:** What was your research and what was the basis for it?

**A:** I was interested in whether or not transformational learning can take place in a community college setting. Furthermore, I was interested in whether or not transformational learning played a role in the decision of community college students to further their education at university. My research provided evidence that there is indeed a potential for transformational learning at the community college level. Especially around the confidence of learners in their abilities to complete post-secondary learning. Some of the stories that the students told me made me really proud to work at NSCC. Not surprisingly, students attributed the relationships with staff and faculty as the biggest reason for their change in view about education and their future. They spoke about the fact that this was the first time someone cared about their learning, worked with them and encouraged them to succeed.

**Q:** What is transformative learning?

**A:** Perspective transformation is a term used by Jack Mezirow to help explain how adults learn. In his book, he states: “Essentially, every person views the world through his or her own frame of reference. A perspective transformation occurs when, because of some transformational experience, a person changes his or her view or perspective and creates a new frame of reference.”

Mezirow (1997) defines transformative learning as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience – associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses – frames of reference that define their life world” (p. 1). He adds that we use these frames of reference to help us understand our life experiences. Given that we have developed these frames of reference through which we view the world earlier in our lives and have used them, often successfully, to make sense of things we experience, we often tend not to accept easily new ideas or directions that do not fit within our current



frames of reference. When transformational learning occurs, learners are able to alter their frames of reference through a process of critical reflection. This allows new ideas to form and new experiences to occur.

**Q:** Describe why you were interested in the transition of community college students to university.

**A:** Many of our students decide to make the jump from community college to university and I was always curious as to why and how they did when they got there. I felt that students weren't thinking of university when they came to NSCC and I wanted to confirm that and find out why they changed their minds. I did confirm my suspicion and found that the majority of students had no intention of doing a university degree but following their time at NSCC they actually changed their views about their confidence and decided to make the leap.

**Q:** What was the time frame for you to research this topic?

**A:** The actual research and write up were completed over two years.

**Q:** At the beginning of your program, what did you hope to learn and did you achieve this?

**A:** My goal was to do research that would be useful for both the community college and universities. I believe that I definitely accomplished that goal.

**Q:** What kind of articulation agreements are reached between NSCC and universities to enable this transition?

**A:** There are many two plus two articulation agreements between NSCC and universities across the coun-

try. Two plus two allows the student to achieve both a community college diploma and a university degree. There are also many students who complete their degree first and then come to NSCC for advanced diplomas or additional skills.

**Q:** You recently presented your research at the University of Calgary? Tell us about this experience.

**A:** I had the opportunity to present my paper at the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) conference at the University of Calgary and the paper is now published in the proceedings of that conference. It was an amazing experience to get feedback on my work from many accomplished academics across Canada.

**Q:** How did the students in your research experience transformative learning?

**A:** It is the fact that community college students will experience a deep shift in fundamental aspects of their identities that places them in an unexpected and significant position of confidence in themselves as learners. This transformation in confidence in their skills often results in a decision to continue their studies at university. It is apparent that, by themselves, the development of skills or an increase in confidence would be insufficient to enhance the success of students. Rather, it is a combination of both, the development of the skills accompanied by an increase in confidence that comes from a critical reflection on those skills and experiences that best prepares the learner for further study.

**Q:** How did this learning impact on your role as principal of Marconi Campus, NSCC?

**A:** My research reaffirmed my anecdotal knowledge



of the impact that we as educators have on the lives of those who place their trust in us to help them in their educational journey. I am always mindful when speaking with faculty and administrators to ensure that people are aware of the research and the real impact that they have on their students. I believe there is a significant opportunity to further develop the work and implement some of the strategies.

**Q:** Are you interested in further pursuing this topic?

**A:** Absolutely. The reason I chose to do the thesis was so that I could build a body of knowledge around transformational learning at the community college level. I firmly believe that there are some significant lessons for curriculum development and transitional development at both the university and community college level that will help in building the success of students. This in turn can have a significant impact on the province.

**Q:** Do you see your research helping to develop curriculum at community colleges and universities?

**A:** Understanding whether or not NSCC provides students with the opportunity to transform their world-views while enrolled in its programs could significantly impact the teaching, learning and curriculum development in the College. It could shape the way NSCC interacts with and explores the world of business with its students. More importantly, understanding what it was that helped the students to transform their perspectives might help NSCC faculty and staff understand the

impact they are having on students.

**Q:** What was the result of your graduate studies in lifelong learning experience?

**A:** I actually believe that I am a product of my own research. When I first started in the graduate program, I really didn't have the confidence in myself as an academic writer. I have a business degree and a professional accounting designation but I felt intimidated by the academic process. My advisor Donovan Plumb was amazing to work with. He believed in me and encouraged me all along the way. As I progressed in the work, I began to believe in myself and all that I had accomplished.

### Reference:

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. No. 74 Summer 1997 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

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Deborah McVeigh is a Faculty member at NSCC, Marconi Campus







# POSITION PAPER

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & NOVA SCOTIA'S PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAM

October, 2017

### ABSTRACT

This paper will examine early childhood development and education and the current pre-primary model in Nova Scotia by: (1) providing a brief overview of pre-primary in the Nova Scotian context, (2) summarizing best practices as seen nationally and internationally, (3) analyzing the gaps between well supported best practices and the current model in Nova Scotia, and (4) concluding with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union's (NSTU) position on early childhood education and development.

### NOVA SCOTIA PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAM IN CONTEXT

The Government of John Hamm proclaimed the *Pre-Primary Education Act* in March of 2006 outlining the authority of the Minister of Education and Governor in Council to supervise and manage the Act and to make regulations.<sup>1</sup> The Act, in its entirety, is less than 250 words and to date has no regulations accompanying it. The only information that can be garnered from this document is that the government of the day envisioned a need for pre-primary education for children under the age of six and believed it should fall under the broader jurisdiction of public education.

Under the Government of Darrell Dexter an internal government working group was formed in 2011 to investigate services for early years (prenatal to school-age). The *Early Years Project* had representation from the Departments of Education, Community Services, Health and Wellness, and the Office of Policy and Priorities. The NSTU participated in a focus group during this process.

This project led to a shift in service delivery with the vision of an integrated approach to supporting children and families.

In 2013 the Government of Stephen McNeil expanded the Department of Education to include an Early Years Branch, creating the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This new Department was given the responsibility of supporting the learning, care and well-being of children through the prenatal period to age-six. The *Evaluation Framework Early Years Centres Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development* document lays out the government's foundation work on the Early Years Centres (EYC) and explains why and how the program would be evaluated.<sup>2</sup>

The 2013 report states, "Early Years Centres in Nova Scotia are following similar models as have been implemented in Toronto (Toronto First Duty) and New Brunswick (Early Childhood Development Centres)." Though the document states that they were following the lead from these two jurisdictions, the document fails to demonstrate the alignment of its program with these other two. The document sets out three core services that the EYC were to meet: play-based early learning programs for children in the year before entering school; family supports and resources; and regulated child care responsive to family needs. The report discusses the need to consult with stakeholders. There was a day-long workshop held to discuss the EYC program; however, the NSTU was not invited to be part of these discussions.

Phase 1 saw the introduction of EYC into four Nova Scotian schools, an assessment of which can be found in *Evaluation of the Early Years Centre Round 1 (2013 – 2015)*

*Provincial Report*.<sup>3</sup> Phase 2 saw an expansion of the program to add four more schools for a total of eight schools in the province, an assessment of which can be found in *Evaluation of the Nova Scotia Early Years Centres Year 2 Provincial Report February 2017*.<sup>4</sup> These two reports were produced by an evaluation team from Dalhousie University, Research Power Incorporated, and Mount Saint Vincent University.

Sometime between the February 2017 report and the beginning of the 2017/2018 school year there was a shift from early years centres and early learning programs to pre-primary classes and pre-primary program.

The current Pre-Primary Fact Sheet gives a very brief overview of the Pre-Primary Program as it was rolled out in September 2017.<sup>5</sup> This document states that the program will be offered during standard school hours, yet neglects to say that some programs will not encompass the full school day. The document also states that there is a world class early learning curriculum framework; however, it neglects to mention that the curriculum is still under development. It appears that the pre-primary program as offered in Nova Scotia is meant to be child care for children four years old by December 31 offered in public schools.

It is important to note that two of the schools from the two-year pilot had previous experience with running some form of early years programs. Rockingstone Heights School from Phase 1 had seven years experience with *Early Learning Opportunities*. Ecole Beau-Port from Phase 2 had eight years experience with *Grandir en Français*. Fully one quarter of the pilot schools had experience running programs for this age group, which may tend to skew the baseline of the evaluations.

Other than anecdotal information, surveys, and administration/attendance records the evaluation methodology was based on three instruments: *Indicators of Change* (IOC), *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – 3* (ECERS-3), and *Early Development Instrument* (EDI). The IOC tool was developed by the Toronto First Duty project and adapted for Nova Scotia; it is used to measure progress towards integration of services.<sup>6</sup> The ECERS-3 is widely accepted internationally as an instrument for assessing the overall quality of early childhood programs.<sup>7</sup> The EDI was developed at the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University.<sup>8</sup> The EDI assesses school readiness of students as they begin their first year of school and is widely accepted in Canada and internationally.

The Phase 2 report notes the following limitations: “The EYCs in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 sites are at different

stages of implementation, with some sites developing, others transitioning and adapting and others experiencing challenges which can be both unique to sites and systemic in nature.” Outstanding challenges were reported which can be generalized to include: inconsistencies between sites, qualifications of staff, lack of integration with other services, barriers to access, lack of buy-in on play-based philosophy, and lack of data. The authors end their evaluation questioning the ability to demonstrate evidence on the effectiveness of the program using the EDI tool because of a lack of past-participation in the Early Learning Program by Grade Primary students.

### QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BENCHMARKS

It is critically important to ensure the pre-primary program, within the continuum of the Public School Program (PSP), be founded on developmentally appropriate philosophy, research, and teaching practices relevant to early years education. Quality should be measured against both national and international standards.

The Innocenti Research Centre of UNICEF produced a document in 2008 entitled *Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD* which outlines 15 benchmarks for evaluating quality of early childhood education and care programs.<sup>9</sup> The 15 benchmarks are broken into four categories: social and family context, governance of early childhood systems, access to services, and program quality. Not surprisingly, several of the benchmarks speak to health services, child poverty, maternity/parental leave, and the need for appropriate policy and governance. The benchmarks for quality on accessibility state that at least 25% of children aged three and under should have access to public subsidies for child care and that there should be at least 80% of four-year-old children participating in publicly funded education. The benchmarks on program quality express the need for in-servicing of staff, the minimum of three-years of post-secondary education for staff in early education centres, and the alignment of staff qualification, working conditions and salaries amongst early childhood care providers, educators, and the social sector.

There is much discussion regarding the Ontario model of early childhood education as the Nova Scotian Government is holding it up as the system to emulate. The document *The Kindergarten Program* (2016) was produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education and outlines in great detail how the two-year kindergarten program in Ontario operates.<sup>10</sup> The Ontario Ministry of Education developed full-day early

childhood education for 4-year olds (Junior Kindergarten) and 5-year olds (Senior Kindergarten) as a component of their Public School Program over time; this was done in consultation with educational partners such as Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO). ETFO's position paper *Full-Day Kindergarten Moving Ontario Forward* was published in 2008.<sup>11</sup> ETFO had a great deal of influence in shaping the current kindergarten system in Ontario.

The Ontario Ministry of Education's vision for its kindergarten program is as follows: "The Kindergarten program is a child-centred, developmentally appropriate, integrated program of learning for four-and five-year-old children. The purpose of the program is to establish a strong foundation for learning in the early years, and to do so in a safe and caring, play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children." The fundamental components of the Ontario model include kindergarten (both junior and senior) as the beginning of formal early childhood education, as part of the PSP, with a full instructional-day, taught by certified teachers, with the aid of early childhood educators, within elementary schools, and founded on play-based learning. The similarity between Ontario's junior kindergarten program and Nova Scotia's pre-primary program begins and ends with the age group and the foundation of play-based development/learning.

### IMPORTANCE OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Research shows that age-appropriate, well-developed, play-based learning contributes to greater competencies in academic skills, social and emotional growth, and suitable behaviour. The Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) recently wrote a *Statement on Play-Based Learning* saying it is supported by science, by experts, and by children and parents.<sup>12</sup> It reports: "There is now evidence that neural pathways in children's brains are influenced and advanced in their development through exploration, thinking skills, problem solving, and language expression that occur during play." The report quotes experts expounding on the virtues of play-based learning as the leading source of growth in terms of emotional, social, physical, language, and cognitive development. The statement concludes with: "When children are playing, children are learning."

Guided play allows children to discover and experiment using interactive tools and practices, and helps develop academic, social, emotional, and behavioural skills. Wherever children are experimenting with their environment, acting out a role, manipulating shapes and objects, or creating, they are involved in learning through play. The National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recently reported on *The Case of Brain Science and Guided Play* defining the teacher's role in guided play, emphasizing the benefit to children's development, and explaining the brain science behind it.<sup>13</sup>

The teacher's role in guided play, as well as an interactive and experiential learning environment is fundamental to the child's development and learning. Through observing, documenting, and analyzing the play, teachers are able to engage children to create, solve problems, and think critically. Furthermore, teachers' involvement in play demonstrates to the children the importance of play and promotes a positive relationship between the teacher and students.

### WHY THE PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAM SHOULD BE PART OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAM

There are many advantages in having pre-primary classes run within elementary schools as part of the Public School Program. The resources, both physical and human, are well suited to enhance program delivery. Early integration into the school community creates a greater sense of belonging. Having pre-primary as part of the PSP ensures there is a continuum of scaffolded learning across the early years programming.

Elementary schools typically have the physical plant and geographical location well suited for high quality educational programs and accessibility. Elementary schools provide students and their teachers with access to resources such as gymnasiums, outdoor play structures and spaces, and libraries. Having pre-primary classes located within elementary schools generally allows for suitable indoor furnishings and age-appropriate infrastructure, as well as the possibility to share sound pedagogical material and resources with co-workers.

Having pre-primary as part of the PSP within schools permits greater access to program supports and educational specialists. The pre-primary program can be significantly enhanced if integrated into the PSP by allowing access to: specialist teachers (phys-ed and music), library resources, resource and learning centre teachers, and educational specialists such as school counsellors, speech language pathologists, and school psychologists. In conjunction with having qualified teachers delivering the program and having access to educational specialists there is a greater chance of early identification and intervention for children with special needs.

Having pre-primary students participate in school activities such as concerts, gardening and other environmental projects,



winter carnival, science fair, heritage days, etc. will boost the students' sense of community and belonging. Mentoring activities such as "Reading Buddies" will benefit both younger and older students.

### TEACHER QUALIFICATION

Two of UNICEF's 15 benchmarks for quality early childhood education and care programs in OECD countries address the qualifications of staff. Qualified teachers, holding a certificate to teach in Nova Scotia, should be employed in all school-based early childhood education programs (pre-primary). In Ontario, the jurisdiction being held up as a gold standard, the classroom is staffed by a certified teacher and an early childhood educator.

The main function of early years teachers is to develop young children's fundamental skills of academics, social awareness, emotional stability, and appropriate behaviour in preparation for elementary school. The teacher must develop these skills while responding to a range of individual developmental needs, learning styles, and economic and cultural diversity needs. Qualified teachers are best suited to support young children's growth starting at pre-primary progressing into their school life.

In Nova Scotia, teachers are required to complete a four-year university degree followed by a two-year education degree before they become qualified to teach. Through their education program, teachers gain expertise in curriculum delivery, assessment techniques, fostering positive learning environments, classroom management, and identification of learning and behavioural challenges. This pre-service education is essential for working within an elementary school. Qualified teachers are better educated to help facilitate the early diagnosis and treatment of physical, behavioural, and learning disabilities.

Increasingly the importance of educators having at least one university degree when working with young children is being recognized nationally and internationally. One of UNICEF's key benchmarks of quality for early childhood education and care is the requirement that at least 50 per cent of staff of early education centres are composed of professionals with a minimum of three-year post-secondary training. Internationally, including most European countries and many states in the USA, there are requirements to have a three or four-year university degree to work in this sector.

A recent US study examined the extent to which university-educated teachers had developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in their classrooms compared to early childhood educators with less than a bachelor's degree.<sup>14</sup> In general, the

study found that those with four years or more of college education, even if in an unrelated field, were stronger in their DAP than those with less education. The study concluded by saying: "Teachers of young children, first and foremost, need depth and breadth of education and experience, exposure to a world of ideas and perspectives, along with the skills to communicate and express their knowledge fluidly – the type of knowledge, skills, and stimulation acquired most handily through a 4-year degree program."

One of UNICEF's 15 benchmarks addresses participation in professional development, which enhances student achievement. Certified teachers contractually have greater access to professional development funds and in-service opportunities. There is a strong correlation between teachers' professional development and enhanced student achievement. UNICEF cites regular in-servicing as one of their key benchmarks for quality early childhood education and care.

### CONCLUSION

The NSTU recognizes early childhood education as being inclusive of the time of school entry through early elementary including pre-primary education. More explicitly, pre-primary should be a component of a quality, equitable, universal, inclusive, and accessible public education system. Well-designed early childhood education programs enrich young children's lives and create a foundation for their growth and development throughout their education.

An effective early childhood education program should be appropriate developmentally in terms of:

- following well-developed play-based, discovery-based, experiential, and interactive curricula;
- meeting the children's needs academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviourally;
- responding to a range of individual developmental needs and learning styles; and
- responding to cultural diversity.

Provincial funding for early childhood education should be at appropriate levels to provide for:

- early diagnosis and treatment of physical, behavioural, and learning disabilities;
- program supports such as library, guidance, and other student services;
- adequate physical resources to ensure a safe and healthy learning and teaching environment; and

- appropriate staffing to accommodate all of the students' health and wellness requirements.

Finally, early childhood education programs require resources to allow for:

- delivery by a qualified teacher holding a certificate to teach in Nova Scotia; and
- appropriate support.

The NSTU policy on early childhood development outlines what both research and practice tell us should be the guiding principles of any early childhood education program. This position paper reiterates our beliefs about effective and appropriate early childhood education programs. It advocates for the best type of early years education for Nova Scotian children and it articulates the gap between what we believe is best and what is being provided by the pre-primary program.

We implore the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to re-examine the pre-primary program as implemented, and discuss with education partners, such as the NSTU, how to better ensure that what is being implemented truly meets the standard of world class early years programming. Our children and all Nova Scotians deserve and demand an education system that is modelled on the best.

### Resources

1. Pre-primary Education Act, <http://nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/preprimy.htm>
2. Evaluation Framework Early Years Centres Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, [www.nshrf.ca/sites/default/files/2014\\_11\\_26\\_eyc\\_evaluation\\_framework\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.nshrf.ca/sites/default/files/2014_11_26_eyc_evaluation_framework_report_final.pdf)
3. Evaluation of the Early Years Centres Round 1 (2013 – 2015) Provincial Report, [www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/2015earlyyearscentreevaluationen.pdf](http://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/2015earlyyearscentreevaluationen.pdf)
4. Evaluation of the Nova Scotia Early Years Centres Year 2 Provincial Report February 2017, <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/year2eycprovincialevaluationreport.pdf>
5. The Pre-Primary Fact Sheet, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, [https://www.ednet.ns.ca/sites/default/files/docs/fact\\_sheet\\_pre-primary\\_english.pdf](https://www.ednet.ns.ca/sites/default/files/docs/fact_sheet_pre-primary_english.pdf)
6. First Duty Indicators of Change, [https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Children's%20Services/Divisional%20Profile/Past%20Projects/firstduty/indicators\\_oct2005.pdf](https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Children's%20Services/Divisional%20Profile/Past%20Projects/firstduty/indicators_oct2005.pdf)
7. Introduction to the Environment Rating Scales, <https://www.ersi.info/scales.html>
8. What is the Early development Instrument, <https://edi.offordcentre.com/about/what-is-the-edi/>
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Louis Robitaille is an executive staff officer with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union





## Haiti: Resources very limited, but unlimited will!

*Julie Mireault-Wiseman*

**H**ow can I put into words the emotions and experiences I had on Project Overseas in Haiti this past July? It was a true privilege to work alongside teachers who are so dedicated and have such a thirst for knowledge. Just like us, they want to improve their educational system. Yes, they have very limited resources but their will is unlimited!

With the financial support of the NSTU and the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF), I had the honour to teach and learn with Haitian “camarades” who are determined and have such tenacity. The term “camarade” is used because the Haitian teachers are part of a union, and so are we.

We were a team of four teachers: Sylvie Salomon from Yukon, Oscar Ngoie-Kadila from Alberta, Rachid Kherraji from Ontario, and me from Nova Scotia. For two weeks, we gave workshops on competency-based learning and classroom management. It was the teachers from Haiti who identified the areas of their needs prior to our arrival.

Haitians are welcoming and endearing. They help one another like nowhere else in the world. It is also a country that awakens your senses. The mountains and their limestone deposits are magnificent. The calls of the tropical birds are marvelling. The mangos are refreshing, and the heat is a challenge that can be overcome.

I can't help but wonder if the Haitians I shared my life with for three weeks learned as much as I did. You see, it is when we get out of our comfort zone that we can change. I learned so much about the Haitian culture, about myself, and I also have two new and delicious recipes.

If you are open to new experiences and challenges, you want to share your pedagogical knowledge and you are

ready to work in a developing country, I highly recommend that you apply to Project Overseas this fall. Your life will be richer for it, as will the lives of the teachers and their students with whom you will be working with. <http://www.nstu.ca/nstu-members/professional-development/grants-opportunities/project-overseas/>

As Miriam Adeney said: “You will never be completely at home again, because part of your heart always will be elsewhere. That is the price you pay for the richness of loving and knowing people in more than one place.”

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Julie Mireault-Wiseman is a teacher at Sir John A. MacDonald High School, Halifax Regional School Board.



## Haiti : ressources très limitées mais volonté sans bornes!

*Julie Mireault-Wiseman*

**C**omment puis-je trouver les mots pour décrire les émotions et toutes les expériences que j'ai vécues **durant le Projet Outremer en Haïti en juillet 2017?** Ce fut un immense privilège de travailler aux côtés d'enseignantes et d'enseignants si dévoués et si désireux d'apprendre. Tout comme nous, ils veulent améliorer leur système éducatif. Oui, leurs ressources sont très limitées mais leur volonté est sans bornes!

Grâce au soutien financier du NSTU et de la Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants (FCE), j'ai eu l'honneur d'enseigner et d'apprendre aux côtés de « camarades » haïtiens qui font preuve d'une grande détermination et d'une grande ténacité. Le terme « camarade » est utilisé ici car les enseignants haïtiens sont syndiqués, tout comme nous.

Nous étions une équipe de quatre enseignants : Sylvie Salomon du Yukon, Oscar Ngoie-Kadila de l'Alberta, Rachid Kherraji de l'Ontario et moi-même de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Pendant deux semaines, nous avons animé des ateliers sur l'apprentissage axé sur les compétences ainsi que la gestion de classe. Ce sont les enseignants haïtiens qui avaient identifié leurs besoins préalablement à notre arrivée.

Les Haïtiens sont des gens chaleureux et attachants qui s'entraident comme nul par ailleurs au monde. C'est aussi un pays qui éveille vos sens. Leurs montagnes et leurs dépôts calcaires sont magnifiques; les cris des oiseaux tropicaux sont fascinants; les mangues sont très rafraîchissantes et la chaleur est un défi que l'on apprend à surmonter.

Je ne peux pas m'empêcher de me demander si les Haïtiens que j'ai côtoyés pendant ces trois semaines ont appris autant que j'ai appris. Voyez-vous, c'est quand nous sortons des sentiers battus que nous pouvons évoluer. J'en ai tellement appris à propos de la culture haïtienne, de moi-même et j'ai aussi découvert deux nouvelles recettes délicieuses.

Si vous êtes ouvert(e) aux nouvelles expériences et aux nouveaux défis, si vous souhaitez partager vos connaissances pédagogiques et êtes prêt(e) à travailler dans un pays

en développement, je vous recommande fortement de poser votre candidature au Projet Outremer cet automne. Votre vie s'en trouvera enrichie tout comme celle des enseignants avec qui vous travaillerez et de leurs élèves. <http://www.nstu.ca/nstu-members/professional-development/grants-opportunities/project-overseas/>

Comme l'a dit Miriam Adeney : « Vous ne vous sentirez plus jamais vraiment chez vous parce qu'une partie de votre cœur sera toujours ailleurs. C'est le prix à payer pour l'expérience enrichissante d'aimer et de connaître des gens dans différents endroits. »

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**Julie Mireault-Wiseman est enseignante à l'école secondaire Sir John A. MacDonald du Conseil scolaire régional d'Halifax.**





## Failing with Dignity

Sue Smiley

Several years ago, I signed up for a two-day workshop called “The Joy of Failure.” As a recovering perfectionist, I was seeking ways to discard the “pretty” in favour of the “messy.” Unfortunately, this great sounding workshop turned out to be a clowning – yes, you read that correctly – a clowning workshop. While wearing a red nose we were asked to share our intimate fears and personal struggles. I lasted one day and did not return but my quest to embrace failing has remained.

Over the years, I have reframed “I failed” to “I tried,” which speaks to the courage it takes to try. “I tried” is a vulnerable space that connects a dream with an action. Vulnerability does not mean invincibility. Therefore, failure is not the opposite of success; it is part of success. In her book, *A Nation of Wimps*, Hara Marano argues: “Failure, after all, is just information, a signal to try something else, another chance to learn... not a fixed and frozen outcome or catastrophe.” Unfortunately, not everyone has that understanding and students may feel failing means “I shouldn’t have tried.”

“Failure is not an option,” said Ed Harris in the movie *Apollo 13*. He was referring to the safe return of astronauts to earth. In the space of academia, failure is always an option. Students may come from a system that pushes them forward without the necessary skills

to navigate post-secondary terrains: literacy, digital citizenship and self-awareness.

Timing (read this slowly and with great emphasis) is a significant factor in learning. Even the most capable person needs the timing to be right for success. I went to university three years after the death of my first husband. I was accepted the year he died. I would not have been able to learn then at the university level as grief occupied the headspace I needed for school.

Timing continues to be a theme throughout my life – I found love again after 18 years of widowhood. “I wish I had met you sooner,” I lamented one day. His response was, “I wasn’t ready for you sooner – I needed to work on myself, by myself.”

I teach, which means I learn and struggle. I witness the struggle of students who fall down seven times and get up eight or who leave the big top of academia







and do not return for reasons we as educators may never know. Some of our students face significant financial barriers, mental health issues, self-esteem wounds that only hear feedback as judgment, undiagnosed learning differences and challenges we cannot anticipate.

Learning requires students to bring their whole self – “head, heart and hands.” In the School of Health & Human Services, we prepare graduating students to work with the most vulnerable of populations – their hands may be the last hands a client feels before leaving this planet. Some students can achieve academic success however may lack the maturity, emotional growth and self-awareness required to function in a field that requires the highest of care and concern.

Early intervention and identification of barriers may help facilitate failing with dignity and provide a space for students to come back when significant barriers are reduced. Accountability and academic integrity are reasonable reframes to fault and blame, or worse, feeling intellectually incapable. An approach that accommodates diverse learning styles combined with industry standards is necessary for the field.

This approach requires conversations that are difficult to speak and difficult to hear. It requires systemic support that values failing with dignity over enrolment numbers. Curricular reform takes a great deal of optimism and risk; embracing failure as a pause and redirect and not an end. Social pedagogy is the practice of building strong and positive authentic relationships with students that transcend transcripts: “You have incredible emotional intelligence. Your written communication skills need upgrading. We’ll be here when you’re ready.”

While attending a recent faculty-working group, one of my wise colleagues, Raylene Bowman, evoked the phrase “failing with dignity.” It was as if a giant finger flicked the side of my head and woke me up to the possibility of how we could support students to understand their lack of academic success with dignity and insight into the barriers that impacted on their learning potential with an invitation to future possibilities.

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Sue Smiley is a faculty member at the Nova Scotia Community College, Kingstec Campus.

## aviso Readership Survey

- NSTU is conducting a survey about Nova Scotia
- teachers’ professional magazine, aviso. We hope
- you can take approximately five minutes to answer
- these questions. Your responses will help guide our
- decisions about aviso moving forward. Thank you.
- ⦿ <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Aviso>



## What are the markers of an effective early childhood education program?

*Crystal Isert*

**R**ecently, there has been a fair amount of discussion about early childhood education in Nova Scotia. Our Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) continues to pull back the beginning date of our children's formal education. In the last ten years, the enrolment birthday cut-off was moved from September 30<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> and beginning this year, they offer enrolment in a pre-primary program that takes place in our schools. Children now begin their formal education another year earlier. The provincial government claims Nova Scotia is the third jurisdiction in Canada to implement a pre-primary program. We need to take a hard look at what research says are the markers of a quality early childhood education program.

Does adding another year make our early childhood education program more effective? According to research done by David Whitebread, a developmental psychologist at the University of Cambridge, and Sue Bingham, an early childhood education consultant, superior learning and motivation happens when children spend time playing rather than from instructional approaches. They also cite studies in the United States that show significantly lower marks for grade six students who had academically directed preschool learning in comparison to those who participated in play-based programs.

In Canada, educators like myself, prefer to look up to the Finnish Education System rather than looking south to our American counterparts. Finland has been scoring better than Canada in the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA), an assessment we participate in through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Canada typically performs in the top ten, not far behind Finland. The United States is usually ranked 25-30 out of the 72 countries that participate.

Discussions among educators in the Maritimes portray a common theme: why spend so much effort trying to copy the American ideas on education when their ideas are not working? In Finland, there is also a pre-primary program but it is aimed at six-year-olds rather

than three and four-year-olds like Nova Scotia's newly minted pre-primary program. According to the Finnish National Board on Education (FNBE), they have one of the lowest amounts of teaching time in the world with a maximum of four hours per day (this is for pre-primary to grade six). In their pre-primary program, they aim to develop learning-to-learn skills through play and joy. Our own pre-primary classes are also play-based learning for the purpose of transitioning into grade primary the following year. In Finland, students enrolled in pre-primary also have access to free lunch and health care (including nurses and dentists). The average school in Finland has 195 students and the average class size is 19. Our government and school boards continue to close the smaller schools to save money. Teachers report job satisfaction in Finland. All of these factors play a role in their success in educating their youngest people. In Nova Scotia, our government says that they are looking to Finland but copy one small part and then look to the south for ways to implement it.

How do we evaluate the government's implementation of its early education program? What are the markers of an effective early childhood education program? Some would suggest that maintaining low teacher-to-student ratios is paramount. Nova Scotia has guidelines that govern class ratios in pre-primary and primary classes. It has



implemented a one-to-ten ratio with a maximum of 24 students and three staff for the new pre-primary classes. This is higher than what is allowed in licensed daycare centres across the province which are mandated to have a one-to-eight Early Childhood Educator (ECE)-to-student ratio. Zach Churchill, Nova Scotia's newly elected Minister of Education, stated that the ratio was chosen based on the national norm for pre-primary in schools. We can assume this norm is taken from the other two jurisdictions in Canada due to our government's claim to be the third. Primary classes across Nova Scotia have a teacher-to-student ratio of one-to-twenty.

In the Education Statistics section of the Nova Scotia government's website, it states that the average student-to-teacher ratio in Nova Scotia is 13.5. If we talk to educators, not many believe that ratio is reflected in their schools. Many classes are still at, or over, the caps put into place this year with the \$10 million infusion used to lower class sizes. Comparing Nova Scotia class sizes to the rest of the world is seemingly useless when the data does not reflect the reality in the classroom. About a quarter of the OECD countries claim to have class sizes lower than 20 for primary education and lower secondary education but this data is calculated using the same method as Nova Scotia. They take all the students in the school and divide it by the total number of teachers in the building. This total includes all resource, guidance, learning centres teachers, etc. and brings the average ratio to levels not reflected in the classroom.

Is all the money spent on lower class sizes going to make a difference? In 2012, the OECD published data showing that class size, students' instruction time, teachers' teaching time, and teachers' salaries are the key variables for governments' decisions surrounding educational spending. Furthermore, the OECD showed data indicating that many countries have invested in class sizes but student performance only improved in some countries. One of the conclusions drawn by the OECD from this data is that "reducing class size is not, on its own, a sufficient policy lever to improve the performance of education systems."

So what is a sufficient method to improve the performance of early childhood education programs? It is not only class sizes that count. The notion of quality Early Childhood Education will not be accomplished in a "one-size-fits-all" solution. According to the UNICEF

Office of Research, there are factors that make an early education system sustainable. We need to think of partnerships, school-readiness and equity.

UNICEF found that the interaction between home and school is a very important factor in improving the performance of early childhood programs. Quality Care settings are built on partnerships with family, parents and educators. It is recognized that this will probably be challenging but is an important factor for building a quality program.

Another factor that UNICEF says determines the success of early childhood education programs is children being "developmentally on track." The approach in the early classrooms needs to encourage learning through play. This is fundamental in developing skills such as self-regulation and attentiveness which are the foundations for future learning. Measuring school readiness can be challenging but the tools that exist measure how children are developing socially and emotionally. They also measure cognitive development in order to support language, communication and critical thinking.

The final factor crucial to developing early childhood programs according to UNICEF is, equity and diversity. In Canada, access to early childhood education is limited and quality is uneven across Canada (Friendly, 2016). Quality early childcare needs to be available to every child.

If the provincial government truly wants to make strides in providing quality early childhood education through its pre-primary and primary programs, it needs to look at more than putting some caps on class sizes. It needs to also consider increasing parental involvement; supporting social, emotional and cognitive development, like self-regulation and attentiveness skills; and making sure that it is equitable across the province.

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Crystal Isert is a teacher at Leslie Thomas Junior School, Halifax Regional School Board.





## We Can Fight Child Poverty – Here's How

*Ben Sichel*

**R**ecent numbers from Statistics Canada show that Nova Scotia is tied with New Brunswick for the highest child poverty rate in the country, at 22.2%. More than one out of every five children sitting in our classrooms every day falls into this demographic. We've heard numbers like this before. We become numb to them as they make headlines once or twice a year, then forget once they disappear from the news.

The kids they represent, though, don't disappear from our schools quite so easily. We slip them occasional lunch money, let them raid our pencil collections and push them to their fullest potential. But is there anything else we can do?

I believe there is. As individual teachers we of course strive to make a difference in each one of our students' lives. But as we know from being in a union, we can accomplish much more through collective action.

During the past year's labour dispute, teachers benefited from the support and solidarity of parents, students, and workers in other unions. Similarly, our union often takes a stand in support of other workers in the province, and teachers across the country or even around the world.

A logical extension of this solidarity would be for the union to be involved in efforts for concrete policy changes that would improve the lives of the poorest Nova Scotians. Here are some easy examples:

1. **A significant increase in the minimum wage.** Ontario and Alberta are in the process of increasing their minimum wages to \$15. Nova Scotia's minimum wage, at \$10.85 an hour is the lowest in the country. This is well below what is needed for a single person working full-time to live, let alone someone with children or other dependents. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in Nova Scotia reports a raise in minimum wage to \$15 per hour would benefit one out of every three workers in Nova Scotia, many of whom are women. A *Fight for 15* campaign is getting underway to increase the

minimum wage in this province; our union should support it wholeheartedly.

2. **Raising income assistance rates.** Those people who, for whatever reason, cannot work, rely on income assistance to survive. Many of these people live with physical and/or mental disabilities, chronic illness, or mental health issues. Yet income assistance rates have barely budged in the past several years. The monthly shelter allowance for a family of 3 (\$620) is well below market housing costs, and basic personal allowances are barely enough to buy food. A person's illness or disability shouldn't condemn them and their family to life in poverty; rates need to rise to bring families above the low-income cut-off (a.k.a. the "poverty line").

3. **Affordable, universal early childhood education and care.** The cost of childcare for children below school age is prohibitive for a great many parents. For parents in low-wage jobs, working a job instead of staying home with kids can barely be worth it once daycare costs are factored in. For single parents (90 per cent of whom are women), the decision whether or not to work outside the home can be next to impossible. Election campaigns have seen some parties promise universal child care programs, but these fizzle or are forgotten post-campaign (or the party that promised them fails to get elected).

Universal low-cost child care pays for itself with increased tax revenue coming from parents of young



children having greater access to the workforce. Programs like this exist in Quebec and several European countries and are more effective than tax refunds and benefits at ensuring access to quality care.

4. **Rent control and investment in social and affordable housing.** About a quarter of Canadians, and more than 40% of renters, spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs, a common measure of housing affordability. Rent control (whereby rent could not be raised more than a given percentage per year) and other policy measures can improve housing affordability for those who need it most. A stable living situation is perhaps the most fundamental piece of the puzzle of poverty: without a home, it's hard to do much else.

These aren't impossible ideas. They're practical, feasible solutions to what is often viewed as an intractable problem. Furthermore, although many of these policies have a price tag, they ultimately benefit the

economy by increasing the spending power of the poorest citizens – who, unlike wealthier folks, can't help but spend the extra money in their pockets on necessities.

Many of these policies are already supported by campaigns led by other unions in the labour movement. It wouldn't take much for a union like ours to plug in. Social media campaigns, letter-writing campaigns, rallies or other events can also engage more members to participate in their union.

For years teachers unions have argued, correctly, that child poverty is one of the main systemic obstacles to student learning in our classrooms. We've implored governments to fix the problem, but without always being clear about how they should do so. It's time to be clear that not only is child poverty a solvable problem, but one which has clear, achievable solutions. These are things our union can help fight for.

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**Ben Sichel is a teacher at Prince Andrew High School, Halifax Regional School Board**



**Agency:** means of doing something.



**Power:** authority, strength, ability to do, vigour and energy, deity.



**Sustainability:** that may be maintained, actively support so as to keep from failing.





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