

# aviso



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

Spring 2013

**SUPPORTING OUR  
BOYS AND GIRLS**

IN EDUCATION



As much as you are steadfastly  
committed to your students, we are dedicated  
to you and your needs.

---

We are proud of our relationship with  
the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

For over two years now we have put our expertise in representing trade unions throughout Canada to work for you. We are as committed as ever to meeting and exceeding your needs as our relationship matures. To that end, we dedicate three of our talented and responsive lawyers to providing service to the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. Gail Gatchalian, David Roberts, and David Wallbridge together represent the firm's

professional commitment to ensuring that, with your trust, there is no issue or concern we can't tackle. We are pleased that these three lawyers, backed by the entire firm, are able to provide you with unequalled excellence in legal work shaped by a desire to make a positive difference in people's lives. We also take this opportunity to thank you for your continued confidence.

**PinkLarkin**  
LAWYERS • AVOCATS

[pinklarkin.com](http://pinklarkin.com)

# contents

AVISO | SPRING 2013

column	3	In My Classroom <b>Tuning in</b>   <i>Verne Lorway</i>
	5	Community College Q&A: <b>Accessing Student Services</b>   <i>Deborah McVeigh</i>
	22	So there I was... <b>at Angkor Wat</b>   <i>Dr. Steven Van Zoost</i>
	24	The Back Page <b>Expanding Options and Opportunities for Boys and Girls</b>   <i>Brian Forbes</i>
feature	9	<b>Apparitions After the Machine</b> <i>Paul Syme</i>
theme	13	<b>Boys, Girls and Snowflakes</b> <i>David Ritchie</i>
	15	<b>The Utility Player</b> <i>Greg Dorey</i>
	16	<b>Unions Need to Go Back to School</b> <i>Ben Sichel</i>
	18	<b>Points to Ponder</b> <i>Meg Ferguson</i>
	20	<b>Climbing to Confidence</b> <i>Adam Conner</i>

## We Want to Hear Your Story

Submissions are encouraged from Nova Scotia's public school teachers, community college faculty and professional support staff. Please mail to:

AVISO, 3106 Joseph Howe Drive, Halifax, NS, B3L 4L7

Or email submissions to [aviso@nstu.ca](mailto:aviso@nstu.ca)

Manuscripts submitted should reflect AVISO's mandate as a professional journal for Nova Scotia's teaching profession. Manuscripts will not be returned. Any manuscript chosen to appear in AVISO may be edited for clarity, style, length and consistency.

Contributor guidelines are available to interested writers on the NSTU Website — [www.nstu.ca](http://www.nstu.ca)

Please ensure email attachments are Microsoft Word, Rich Text Format or Text Only.

Original pictures or images related to submitted content are appreciated.

The themes for the 2013-2014 academic year AVISO editions are:

Fall – Inclusive Education

Winter – Assessment for Success

Spring – Lifelong Learning

## Racontez-nous votre histoire

Nous encourageons des soumissions des enseignants des écoles publiques, du personnel enseignant et de soutien des collèges communautaires. Veuillez envoyer vos soumissions à :

AVISO, 3106 chemin Joseph Howe, Halifax, NS, B3L 4L7

Ou bien envoyez vos soumissions par courrier électronique à : [aviso@nstu.ca](mailto:aviso@nstu.ca)

Les manuscrits soumis devraient refléter la mission d'AVISO en tant que revue professionnelle des enseignants de la Nouvelle Écosse. Les manuscrits ne seront pas retournés. Les manuscrits sélectionnés pour la publication dans AVISO pourront être édités pour ce qui est de la clarté, du style, de la langue et de la cohérence.

Les directives relatives aux collaborateurs sont disponibles en consultant le site Web du NSTU — [www.nstu.ca](http://www.nstu.ca)

Les manuscrits envoyés par voie électronique doivent être en format Microsoft Word, Rich Text Format ou Texte seulement.

Les photos/images originales reliées aux soumissions sont appréciées.

Les thèmes des éditions d'AVISO pour 2012-2013 sont les suivants:

Automne – Éducation favorisant l'intégration

Hiver – Évaluation axée sur la réussite

Printemps – Éducation permanente



Spring 2013 Volume 29 Number 3

**Editor** Simon Wilkin

**Support Staff** Marcia Hirtle

**Graphic Design** Paul Hamer

**Copy Editor** Clare MacIntyre

**Content** David Ritchie

**Editorial Team** Dave Johnson

Dayna Enguehard

Heather Hollis

**Advisory Board** Roland Hannem

Catherine McCarthy

Lee Goreham-Smith

Tami Cox Jardine

Nancy Doyle

Andrew Pedersen

Kim Frank

Betty-Jean Aucoin

**Advertising Sales** Marcia Hirtle  
(902) 477-5621

aviso is published three times per year by the  
**Nova Scotia Teachers Union**  
**3106 Joseph Howe Drive**  
**Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, B3L 4L7**

Copyright © 2013 by Nova Scotia Teachers Union.  
All rights reserved. Opinions expressed are not  
necessarily those of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.  
aviso is not responsible for unsolicited material.  
Reproduction of aviso content requires the written  
permission of the Editor.

aviso is a trademark of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

aviso is a member of the Canadian Educational Press  
Association.

ISSN 0830-0011

TEL: 1-800-565-6788 or 902-477-5621

FAX: 902-477-3517

Email: [aviso@nstu.ca](mailto:aviso@nstu.ca)

Look for aviso on the NSTU Website:

[www.nstu.ca](http://www.nstu.ca)



A QR code (short for Quick Response) is a specific two-dimensional code used to open a website address. Aviso readers who have a camera phone equipped with a QR reading application can scan the image of the QR code to open a web page in the phone's browser.



# Tuning in:

## How our young people might be developing musical, pedagogical tools

Verne Lorway

**I**n a recent interview for the research I am conducting in my classroom, I asked the students whether or not their ideas about music making influenced the teaching and learning of their after-school song writing club. One of the students commented about their smaller group, saying, “It’s not so much about influencing each other with us; it’s more about putting together everything we have.”

At that very moment it struck me profoundly how this generation of young people might very well be relational thinkers, especially as this student had indicated that their group was able to assemble songs by sharing ideas and listening actively to one another. This student continued to explain how their small group inputs ideas while writing a song, and how each member of their band adds ideas into the process until they all feel the song is complete. I asked myself if this kind of process might apply to the development of a new, more interactive pedagogy in the music classroom. How might such relational practices in which young people are already participating in their everyday lives, inform me as a teacher and adult in the school community, to make changes in my classroom?

Having immersed myself in research in the field of youth studies over the past three years, I have developed an understanding of the importance of student voice in the pedagogy within my classroom. My role has become much more of a collaborator with the girls and boys in my classes, and my aim is to assist them in developing their unique ideas about music making whether

through small and/or large ensemble practices, solo and group performances, audio recording processes and many more facets of music making and musical production. My classroom is much like a creative studio set up as centres of learning. It is comprised of musical instruments, technological tools, recording booths, performance spaces for small and large ensembles, research centres, sharing spaces and practice areas. My teaching activities include direct musical instruction, and the facilitation of peer learning, audio recording, web writing and technical training. I critique, share, learn with and from students, and participate in much laughter! Especially in the case of those voices which might have been previously missing from the curriculum and classroom life in so many ways, I ask myself daily how these voices might ring loud and clear in my classroom to share rich insights into school and society through music, in ways we adults might not be able to hear and see.

I am finding the more I tune in to the concerns of young people for their learning – in my case, in the music class – the more they trust me with information about their world which might assist me

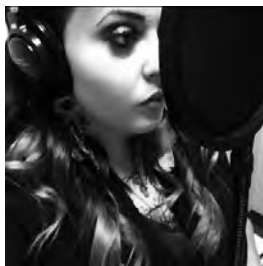
*“How do we shift from purely adult-centred practices to more youth-attuned practices and pedagogies?”*



*Every Other Aspect*



*Margaret*



*Brittany*



*The Ocelots*



*In-class recording studio*

in understanding the landscape upon which their learning is to occur. In a recent after-school club session, one of the students said the real theme of after-school song writer's

club, was about revealing the pressures experienced by young people in school and society right now. In an instant, a flood of images flashed through my mind from the themes in the music they were writing: peer pressure, social groups or "cliques," failed relationships, thoughts of anger, addictions, feelings of violence within the world, futility, anguish and not measuring up to the expectations of adults. For me, the club took on a whole new dimension with a greater understanding of the lived experiences of young people right now.

I started thinking that from these youthful, tune-filled insights are a clear calling for us adults within the school and greater community to "tune in" to their concerns. They have important things to say – or sing, in my case. As one student told me in an interview, "Us weird music folk are in the margins."

In the same interview, this student said in reference to the school and greater community, "They need to listen to us because we have something great to say." While re-imagining the music classroom, I strive to keep central, the utopic vision that these young people carry with them of how things can be when they are listened to with hope and concern.

Referring back to the earlier example of youthful, relational thinking while music-making, I cannot help but wonder what practices I participate in unknowingly that continue to privilege certain students over others through competition, grades and so on. I constantly ask myself how I can work with the students to validate diverse opinions, beliefs and ways of being in the world in order to dissolve these rigid barriers that separate students and in doing so, open up trajectories that may create a better world in the music classroom.

In my research I am hearing how very diverse and dynamic our young people are, and how they are already sharing and working together in ways we adults might not have thought of ourselves. How do we shift from purely adult-centred practices to more youth-attuned practices and pedagogies? If we can "tune in" to youthful thoughts and concerns, I feel we will be mindful of replicating practices in which we adults continue to police the decisions of young people interested in developing their own ideas and interests to enhance their own learning.

The nature of my work has been towards a development to student voice through music, and I believe it takes a whole village to develop these practices. My work is well supported by the school and board administration with whom I am employed and by my university dissertation committee. I am not working with these young people in isolation. We are all a part of a much larger village who are working together to find ways to assist students in their learning and lives. I believe that through dialogue, we will remain open to listening to our children and young people who might very well show us ways to collaborate in the creation of more vibrant, tuneful and youthful classrooms.

---

**Verne Lorway** is a music educator at Sydney Academy, with the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board, and a PhD Candidate in Educational Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island.

# Accessing Student Services

*Deborah McVeigh*

**S**tudents entering the Nova Scotia Community College should be aware of what services are provided by the College to make their transition and learning a success. Kathleen Allen, Dean of Student Services for NSCC, provides information in the following article about the services that can be accessed through her team at each campus.

**Q: Please give our readers a brief description of what Student Services encompasses at NSCC.**

**A:** Student Services encompasses all of the services and supports provided to all learners and prospective learners of NSCC. Our services and supports extend to all online, in-class and blended learners.

Services and supports include:

- **Counselling services** for personal and wellness concerns
- **Career counselling** for anyone beginning their career or who is in career transition
- **Disability supports** including accommodations in testing, note taking, scribing and assistive technology for students with mental, physical or learning disabilities
- **Registrarial services** to ensure enrolment and record accuracy
- **Retention services** to consider options to keep students in school who may be facing any type of challenge, and
- **Employment services** to support students with job readiness skills in the area of resumés, cover letters, interviews and job hunting.

Through all Student Services, team members support all students, the College also provides specialized Aboriginal and African Canadian student supports for students from those backgrounds who would benefit from more specific cultural supports. Student Services coordinates peer tutoring services to all students

and also provides a broad range of workshops and one-on-one training. To support students in study skills, note-taking, test taking strategies, anxiety and stress support groups, anxiety management and time management are provided. Proctoring services are available for students enrolled in online courses and external programs.

**Q: How do the roles of those working in Student Services compare with the roles of guidance departments in the P-12 education system?**

**A:** At NSCC, the students are adults and service delivery is built upon fostering independence, learning to balance life and work, and making career dreams come true. As students mature their issues may be a bit more complex than Primary to Grade 12 students but the need for quality solutions-focused counselling remains the same. Knowledge of community resources is similar and the need to have a variety of tools and resources to meet all students' needs is critically important for both roles. The differences involve helping students access financial aid and child care, manage transportation to and from school, and transition from school to college or college to work. Both roles are committed to helping students reach their full potential and seeing all students succeed.

**Q: Are there any accommodations for students with disabilities who graduate from high school and enter the**

### **community college system? If so, what are they?**

**A:** Students, who identify that they have a disability, work with the disability resource facilitator to create and implement a learning plan with individualized academic accommodations, learning strategies and a selection of support services. The most common accommodations requested by students involve testing – such as extra time, quiet space, oral testing or scribed testing.

Alternate format materials and reduced course load are also common accommodations.

### **Q: Is the role of a Student Services counsellor in NSCC much different from the role of a guidance counsellor in P-12?**

**A:** The counselling work is similar as students meet with counselling staff for assistance with a wide variety of personal issues or concerns that appear to be limiting the student working at their optimal level. NSCC counsellors may do more group sessions on topics such as reducing anxiety, dealing with difficult people or mental health awareness. Working with adults, NSCC counsellors spend less time consulting with family members but may play an active role in connecting the student to community-based resources. NSCC counsellors may provide some academic advising or career counselling but often these duties are taken care of by others on the Student Services team.

### **Q: How do students access the services offered by your department?**

**A:** At some campuses, Student Services team members meet with all classes at the beginning of each academic year to outline the services they offer. In addition, faculty members are aware of our services and promote them to their classes. We use an online referral form to make it easy for faculty to refer a student to Student Services which outlines the nature of the referral. If not referred, students come to the front desk to make an appointment with a specific team member who is immediately available.

### **Q: What is the role of Manager of Student Services?**

**A:** It is the manager's role to ensure that services and supports are provided in an effective, timely and con-

sistent manner. The manager is the gatekeeper of information from the campus management team and other areas and shares any relevant information with campus Student Services teams as needed and conversely, shares relevant information with the campus management team as needed. The manager works alongside the campus management team on issues related to retention, programming and recruitment.

The manager plays a leadership role within the team to educate, promote and encourage embracing of the College's strategic plan and all subsidiary projects which result.

The manager also oversees all human resources related aspects of the Student Services team and works with each team member individually to create a success plan which gives each team member a vision of how their role is part of the bigger picture of the College's strategic plan. The promoting and creation of a strong work culture within the team is part of this leadership role.

### **Q: What is the role of the Student Services team on campus and how do they coordinate college-wide?**

**A:** The role of the Student Services team on campus is to ensure the right supports and services are available as needed to everyone: learners, prospective learners and staff. The team is responsible for organizing annual events such as orientation and convocation. *Get Started* and *Test Drive* are other events which aim to increase awareness and readiness for college study and verify the right program and right fit.

On a college-wide level, each Student Services team member has a functional protocol to a central office department. It is through this department that the respective members from each campus can all connect to communicate, share best practices, and to discuss new opportunities in relation to their work processes.

### **Q: Please describe how a student could access Student Services upon entry to NSCC through to when they finally walk across the stage for convocation.**

**A:** A student may first come across Student Services in *Test Drive* where they determine if the program they are interested in is indeed the right program and fit for them. After being accepted and confirmed in



a program, the *Get Started* process is initiated and communication begins from the campus welcoming them to their program and sharing what supports are available through an introduction to the team and services provided. *Get Started* is another opportunity to make students aware of services and supports that are available and again giving them the opportunity to meet and talk with Student Services staff. A student with a learning disability for example could meet with the disability resource facilitator at any time prior to or after confirming their seat in the program. Such a student would meet with the disability resource facilitator on an agreed upon schedule throughout the period of their program to touch base. If the need arises, and depending on the background of the student, there could be an internal referral to the student counsellor, Aboriginal or African Canadian Student Services coordinator or other team member. Such supports would remain through the academic year and to graduation. The entire process of a student accessing services from Student Services is very much team oriented and would look different for all students. Some students are comfortable coming on their own to access supports and others may need encouragement from faculty, staff or a friend.

**Q: Transition from high school to college can be difficult for many students and particularly for those who have a high level of adaptations, modified programs or an educational assistant. What supports are available for these prospective NSCC students?**

**A:** Students transitioning from high school to college have three levels of support. First, students with special needs are supported by transition planning and transition planning teams within the high school system. Second, this transition planning can assist students in identifying and learning skills for independence whether they explore education or employment options after high school. The *Strait to Work* program is an example of a transition program in Nova Scotia that assists students in developing these independent living and learning skills after high school. Third, the College offers career exploration, program orientation and transition planning for students looking to continue their studies at NSCC.

**Q: What is the Special Admissions process?**

**A:** Special Admissions is an alternate pathway into NSCC programs for students who otherwise don't meet admission requirements because they were on an individualized program plan (IPP) in high school. It provides additional support and steps in the admissions process in order to assess program readiness and fit. Special Admissions serves approximately 100 students around the province each year in both first year and second year programs.

**Q: Coordinators of Student Retention & Employment (CSRE) are unique to NSCC. What role do they play in retention of students?**

**A:** There is at least one coordinator at each campus (two on the larger campuses). A coordinator works with incoming and current NSCC students as they transition into our classrooms – whether they are from high school or from the world of work. Coordinators determine what services or individuals (internal or community) would best support the student in their quest of post-secondary education. Coordinators also offer a number of workshops to assist students with academic and personal success (workshops range from resumé writing to time management skills to job search strategies).

**Q: What is the role of registrar on campus?**

**A:** The campus registrar is the primary steward for advising and implementing the academic policy at each campus. The campus registrar is responsible for ensuring accuracy of student records and timeliness of data input. Course and program withdrawals are overseen by the campus registrar only after there has been a conversation around options to keep that student in class. The campus registrar in close collaboration with the academic chairs advises students on basic program requirements while referring to the academic chairs for more detailed course and program conversations. The registrar is a key support for the annual convocation cycle and works closely with the entire Student Services team on all events and projects taking place through the year.

**Q: How does the student life assistant assist the student associations on site?**

**A:** The student life assistants are tasked to support the day-to-day work of our campus student associations while at the same time providing mentorship and guidance to the student leadership. While many student governments at colleges and universities hire full-time staff to provide historical perspective, consistency, training and operational support throughout the year, NSCC's model is a partnership relationship between the College and our 14 campus student associations to provide this developmental and organizational support.

**Q: One role that appears to be unique in our system is that of Manager of Student Engagement and Awards. What does this job entail?**

**A:** This position is committed to creating an engaging student experience for our students outside the classroom. The position supervises and guides the work of our two student life assistants and works collaboratively with our campus student leadership to enhance our ability to provide quality student life

programming and student engagement opportunities across the province. This position also oversees the development and implementation of college-wide student services (health and dental plan, student handbook, U-Pass program) as well as our student awards program.

**Q: How would a student find information related to services that could be accessed through your department?**

**A:** All students receive a student handbook at the beginning of every year outlining the academic policy, behavioral guidelines and information on supports and services. The Student Services team visits classes at the beginning of the year to introduce students to the available services. Services and supports are introduced on the website and faculty is encouraged to speak with their classes throughout the year about available services. Information is available campus-wide on bulletin boards, electronic advertisements and other social media.

---

Deborah McVeigh is a faculty member at NSCC, Marconi Campus.

# We have offices across Canada. And roots right here.

If you live and work in Nova Scotia, you want accounting advice from top professionals who understand local financial issues. And that's exactly what you'll find at Grant Thornton LLP. Our roots in Nova Scotia reach back to 1939—which may explain why we're the largest accounting firm in Atlantic Canada, with nine offices in Nova Scotia alone. From Yarmouth to Sydney, we know how to help you make the most of your finances.

- Audit and review
- Tax services
- Complex accounting matters
- Corporate finance
- Financial statement preparation
- Strategic advisory
- Operational improvement
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Valuations
- Litigation advisory services
- Recovery and reorganization
- Forensic and investigative services
- Governance, risk and compliance
- Information technology
- Specialized assurance services

[www.GrantThornton.ca](http://www.GrantThornton.ca)



Audit • Tax • Advisory

Grant Thornton LLP, A Canadian Member of Grant Thornton International Ltd  
Some of the defined services may be provided by an associated entity of Grant Thornton LLP.

# Apparitions After the Machine:

## What we need to know about schooling in the electronic age.

Paul Syme

### A journey from machine to cloud

*"Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either." Marshall McLuhan*

From his vantage point in the 1960s, University of Toronto professor and notable media theorist, Marshall McLuhan could see the trajectory of education in the electronic age. A linguist, McLuhan was keenly interested in the affect of new media on humans and society. He noted that whether it's the alphabet, a mug or microcomputer, any innovation caused a cascade of change – dubbing this the Laws of Media. In our movements from being tribal people to mechanical industrialists, humanity witnessed our new technologies alter how we interact with each other in almost every respect. What was ours became mine. We followed work from farms to cities. We turned from guilds and looked to academies to provide education. The hierarchies of representational democracy replaced despots. All aspects of our world changed, and the change was a violent one. If the change and conflict from tribal people to mechanical people was turbulent, should we expect the move from being mechanical to electronic people to be tamer? I suspect we all know the answer to this...

In his day, McLuhan watched people dial into television and tune out of radio. In this, he observed,

*"We expect order and silence while our audience seeks excitement and dialogue."*

we exchanged the vast omni-directional quality of acoustical space with the fixed focal point of our gaze on TV's glow. From continued probing into the relationship of our senses to our inventions McLuhan coined our tools as *extensions of man*. The hammer extends my fist like the cell phone extends my ear – McLuhan asserts that electronic media, like television,

are extensions of our central nervous system. On a more macro scale, since we grow out of a society that depends on machines, much of what we do and how we think still inhabits machine-like qualities. Gazing back to the dawn of electronic media to when Marconi sparked electronic communication, we can see a spark that has since gone nuclear and the cloud it made is the Internet.

Twenty-first century education will be the domain of interconnected electronic people, and public education teachers will remain relevant if we understand our new role and shake off many of the chains cast by the machine age. We see it

and feel it every day, yet like our tribal forefathers in the face of the machine, we resist it. We see cell phones in the classroom and we shut them out. We arrange our desks in neat rows and we watch glassy-eyed students look upon their foreman / teacher for instruction. We expect order and silence while our audience seeks excitement and dialogue.

The indicators of change in our students' expectations for learning experiences are also present in

all of us. I have been a registrar for my provincial association annual conference for five years. It's obvious to me what sessions will fill up and which ones will be cancelled for low to no enrollment. Any session that is billed as a hands-on workshop to offer new skills and strategies will fill up. Conversely, any session that hints at being a traditional classroom setup – with someone talking or presenting and participants sitting and listening – inevitably is cancelled. Putting a finer point on this, if we ourselves don't want to be lectured at, why would we expect our students to thrive in this format? Rather we see many suffer through it. And they don't have to anymore. If we fail to adapt as they awaken to their growing slate of options, we too will be obsolete and out of work. Bye-bye public education? Probably not. As long as parents go to work, they will want someone to nurture their kids. As long as we offer students engaging experiences and meaningful challenges, enriched learning environments, friendly relationships, the capacity to determine how to access and work with developing minds, an understanding ear, etc... most will want to spend their days with us. We need to be their coaches, not their cops.

Have you heard of MOOCs or Massive Open Online Courses? This is a new and growing platform: free courses offered by many of our world's finest teachers from our most prestigious institutions. MOOCs can offer solid online experiences through software environments that can handle hundreds of thousands of students. Sure, we can poke holes in its readiness to do what we do, but for how long? When will our politicians begin encouraging home schooling and MOOC classes as a reasonable way to complete a high school diploma? In Nova Scotia, we already offer cost neutral high school credits through 4-H and Air Cadets.

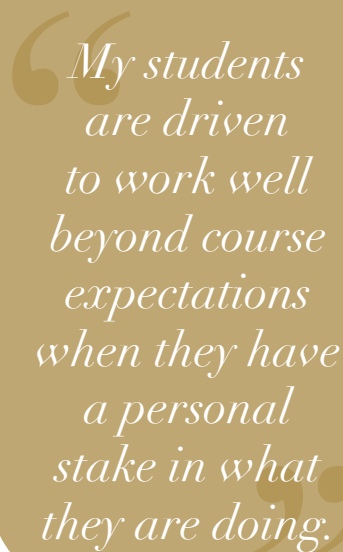
### A path through four Cs

We must adapt and we can, in fact, lead the

way. Where do you see more evidence of imagination at work, pre-school or high school? Thirty million plus viewings on YouTube alone suggests to me that most, if not all, of us have had Sir Ken Robinson explain how schools are killing creativity. Robinson points to a NASA study to measure divergent thinking that was given to 1,600 three to five-year-olds and again when this group was 15-years-old. What they found was that 98 per cent of the three to five-year-olds scored at the genius level with creative thought, and this dropped to 32 per cent by ages eight to 10 and to 10 per cent by age 15. Though this study was from 1968, it's likely consistent with what we witness over our career.

You may have also read about the "creative economy" or the "creative class" as portrayed by Richard Florida who asserts that our creative economy is transforming our cities, laws and immigration policies. Florida has spoken and many politicians are listening. Florida, who also currently hangs his hat at the University of Toronto, asserts that North America's survival in the 21st century economy depends on our capacity to innovate. We need schools that promote creative inquiry and policies that speak of tolerance and openness in order to nourish and welcome creative individuals into our communities. Our prosperity will be driven by those who can employ their whole brain. They think critically and creatively, follow their curiosities and collaborate with others. Like the three Rs, these four Cs should be buoyed and nurtured in our classrooms.

To arrive at a solution, a problem needs to be understood for all of its parts and nuances. To determine a solution's success, it needs to be critically evaluated. Arts students frequently perform critical analysis of their own work and that of others as well as how art forms and is informed by culture. Critical thinking strategies should be core to any curriculum. Alternatively, if all we can do is read, write and do math, we will be good at processing information yet unable to apply information to new problems or de-

A quote in a decorative box. The text is in a light beige serif font, centered within a rounded rectangular box with a slightly darker beige background. The quote is: "My students are driven to work well beyond course expectations when they have a personal stake in what they are doing." The quote is enclosed in large, faint, stylized quotation marks.

*My students  
are driven  
to work well  
beyond course  
expectations  
when they have  
a personal  
stake in what  
they are doing.*



termine fact from fiction. Critical thinking is essential to the creative process. The discipline of critical thought balances the freedoms associated with risk-taking and open imagination.

Creativity grows from imagination. Creation is an idea taking form, and when this original idea is put into practice, it is an innovation. If we want an innovative society we need a population that motivates and practices divergent thinking (imagination), creative inquiry and creative production. Some characteristic strategies to enhance these capacities would be to practice inductive reasoning, explore inventive juxtapositions and freely play with ideas and media. Arts programs do this, however, by themselves arts courses do little to solve this problem. The nourishment of innovation comes from an environment that promotes divergent thinking in every class at every grade, in environments that effectively motivate students to want to learn and master skills. Inquiry-based learning strategies put kids in the driver's seat and away from the textbook. These strategies can be applied in any subject, stimulate creative thinking and motivate kids because they pursue questions that they find relevant. Increased relevance is usually accompanied by greater rigor as the learner may be more intrinsically motivated to tackle a challenge.

To foster creativity, we must also promote risk-taking. When we continue to punish failure, we crush risk-taking behaviour and by extension creativity. Imagine the sense of agency we could embolden in students if we all innovated and shared ways to move towards encouraging risk-taking. Risk-taking should be the fourth R in every child's education.

Creativity occurs in many different conditions. It can come from a reaction to a problem – our instinct for survival drives us to innovate. Creativity also happens, if not more so, in environments that give students the leeway to look at their world from different perspectives growing from a sense of agency to pursue their own curiosities. All humans have a natural drive to learn and adapt to new challenges. If

we have faith in students to develop and follow their own curiosities, they are sure to build greater faith in their own capacity to do so. Twenty-first century teachers no longer need to stand in front of students. Rather, we stand beside them as coaches, cheering them on, teaching them skills, perhaps digging up the right MOOC to help our students find skills that are beyond our own capacities. As teachers, we can help them give form and structure to their inquiries, coaching them from imaginings to innovations.

To cultivate curiosity in what we teach, we would be well served to understand motivation. Dan Pink had the same query which led him to investigate and write *Drive* (2011), a book that explores what motivates workers to succeed. What he learned was surprising. Carrots and sticks only work some of the

time. What really drives persistence and excellence is the right chemistry of giving workers a sense of autonomy, a chance to gain mastery, and to work with purpose. As a teacher, I now hold these revelations as truths. My students are driven to work well beyond course expectations when they have a personal stake in what they are doing. They find meaning and purpose in exploring their own questions, learning new skills that are relevant to their ambitions, and understanding the learning that is before them. This is often why textbooks don't engage students, but labs do. But this is likely not an approach that will necessarily spark

fire under students if first introduced in high school. It is a practice that needs to be employed at every grade level, harnessing and nourishing their creative genius before it is lost or buried under self-doubt and the many mechanical procedures we practice daily from the first bell to the last.

Trading mechanical era practices for those imagined in the electronic era can inspire more than just creativity and curiosity. McLuhan points out that our electronic media is causing us to retribalize, coining the term "global village." In the classroom, this would indicate a release of the teacher's primacy in the front of the room in exchange for students taking

*Conversation is  
key to effective  
collaborations.*

the agency to learn through more collaborations and conversations. Our media enable collaboration, unless we shut it down before we see its potential benefits. A smart phone is, for many students, their tribal tether – a key extension of themselves and their society. It may be disruptive initially, whereas if we learn to harness it, the smart phone may help us all achieve our goals. Rather than an instrument of distraction, it becomes a tool for research, time management, creativity, calculating and collaboration. Would we better serve students by designing schools to reflect the world they live in, or do we continue to have them conform to the construct schools have invented?

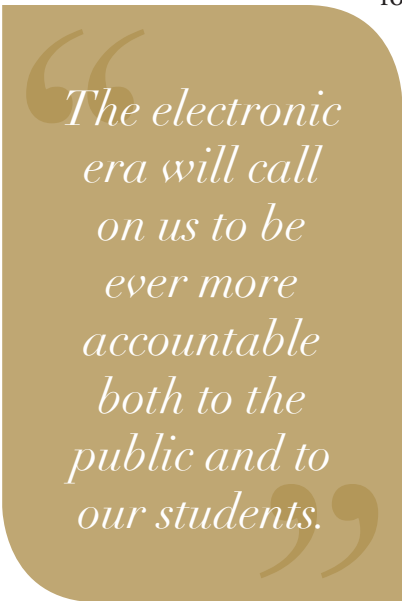
The world changes one conversation at a time. Like us, kids love conversation. It happens everywhere, all the time. When we are teaching, students who at one time would have secretly passed notes now Kik, Bump, IM or iChat. Some kids have the gift of the gab and can't help but talk when we talk – I was one of these. I suspect in their youth, many of our colleagues drove their teachers nuts with endless chatter. This might indicate that we were meant to work with people. Conversation is key to effective collaborations. Creative teaching might lead us to harness these propensities for conversation. Like a pressure cooker lets off steam, kids are more cooperative if they can converse with some frequency. The 21st century classroom will embrace smart phones and learning communities. Harnessing these trends to promote achievement requires classroom design and learning strategies that encourage discussions and inquiry-based learning over the learning silos in which we have grown accustomed.

### **Towards a new horizon...**

The electronic era will call on us to be ever more accountable both to the public and to our students. In this, we must look beyond our conventional assumptions of achievement. Numeracy and literacy offer keys to power, a power that is being shared with

millions more every year (see PISA [www.oecd.org/pisa/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/)). As such, we are seeing explosive global growth in competition. To maintain our position among champions of modernity we will need a society of innovators – people who have nourished dynamic ways of thinking and learning. Helping students develop their whole brain will intensify their capacity to innovate. By accommodating collaborative practices and media, we will enhance our capacity to communicate and to benefit from solving problems through our collective intelligences. In coaching students to illuminate and pursue their own curiosities, we should see more students who are driven to excel and contribute to this world.

To grow creativity in people, schooling will have to be rethought, if not in content, at least in form and practice. We are on our way when we consider the whole child and their whole brain. We have arts programs, though many are marginalized in space, time and resources with too few programs led by specialists. We have schools committing to healthy eating initiatives, many with strikingly different views of what is acceptable nourishment for kids. Fitness is encouraged, but so is sitting for at least five hours every day. Students need to be active in learning, physically and mentally. They need teachers who are partners in learning and schools that provide the ideas, leadership, and resources that nurture the fundamentals and critical thinking alongside play, curiosity and wonder. Kids will fare better in this world if they pursue their own perceptions and dreams than if they follow our preconceptions and ideals. When schools recognize the implications, needs and opportunities of our changing times, we should do well to see our students thrive in this world with us cheering them on from the side.



*The electronic era will call on us to be ever more accountable both to the public and to our students.*

---

Paul Syme teaches art, design and multimedia at Horton High School as well as creative pedagogy at Acadia University. He is also the president of Nova Scotia Art Teachers Association.

# Boys, Girls and Snowflakes

David Ritchie

**W**e all know that every snowflake is supposed to be different from every other snowflake no matter how that challenges our all too limited understanding of probable uniqueness. In fact a visit to an Internet snowflake photography site will reinforce this seemingly improbable reality. The same challenges face us when we ponder and develop the ways we deliver mandated curriculum to students. We are required to meet our students where they are and help them acquire the skill sets that will lead them to the best possible life after school. Current educational practice has blurred the acceptability of graduated achievement as a way to move through our educational system. As a result, we face classes of students who represent a wide range of preparedness, skills, confidence and knowledge.

Recently, there have been serious questions raised regarding the appropriateness of homogeneity of our classrooms – especially as it relates to gender. Convincing arguments make the point that girls tend to do better in math and science when they are academically isolated from boys. As well, co-educational physical education classes seem to limit the level of participation of girls. Particular subjects seem to become self selectors along gender lines. I suspect, even though I have no concrete evidence, that yoga, wood shop and dance might be dominated by either males or females depending on the school culture and the instructor.

The negative results girls have experienced in math and science are not universal; this is only the case in Canada, the United States and Great Britain.

An explanation may be found in cultural constraints as well as brain function. We know boys' and girls' brains work differently. When girls are segregated for math and science and taught in ways specific to the way their brains work, their performance improves. I have always found it interesting that in the former Soviet Union the vast majority of medical doctors are women; a pattern distinctly different in North America. An immediate correction might be to initiate girl-only math and science classes. Eventually, if there is a cultural shift, we might not need to continue to do that to the same extent in order to achieve improved results for girls. We may need to also think about instituting distinct cultural structures at the lower middle school. One possibility is to offer girls math and science clubs. Another might be to expose them

to successful women scientists and mathematicians.

There have also been questions raised regarding the decline in the number of male students pursuing post-secondary education at the university level. In the past, disadvantages experienced by males in their early education due to maturation and gross motor delays (compared with females of the same age) seemed to dissipate as they progressed through school. However there may be cultural and material lifestyle expectations that are intervening. There have been suggestions that as males reach high school, they are more interested than females in shortening their routes to employment by choosing non-university options. The investment in time and money is growing ever more significant as future employment seems dependent on a second degree. Most people are looking at a minimum of six years to acquire the appropriate 21st century credentials at a university. For some reason women seem to find this less daunting and more practical for eventual possible life benefits. When I studied at university many years ago, the majority of students were men and most found fulfilling employment after one degree. It was usually only those who wished to pursue a profession or an academic career who continued on after a first degree. Today it is women who are more likely to be in graduate schools.

The opposite seems true in high school physical education. When I use the term “physical education,” I am not referring to those other credits that fulfill the Department of Education’s requirement. There is a very low enrolment in traditional physical education courses once it ceases to be compulsory and girls are less likely to register than boys. Given what we know about healthy living this seems counterproductive. All students should be involved in physical education for their physical and mental health. One suggestion is that there is no room in the timetable for the average student. Unfortunately, I have noticed in my teaching experience that most students do not carry a full complement of courses possible but rather opt for the minimum requirements to create free periods or early completion in January of their third year. This is totally contrary to one of the advantages of a broad education that was touted as a benefit when semesters were first mandated. Another suggestion is that the

physical education courses are perceived to be very physically competitive and thus threatening for the less able. Many researchers suggest that segregated physical education classes are more appropriate at the high school level.

We have known for years that course selection is dependent on a number of circumstances, one of which seems to be gender. Some courses attract girls and others boys. Part of this seems to be the result of societal expectations in the community. When I first started teaching, I taught in a community that valued music. As a result the school offered choral and band programs and there was never any difficulty filling the complement regardless of gender. I am also familiar with communities where there was not the same value and music was not offered beyond Grade 9. Students who wanted to pursue music did so in private lessons and the majority of them were girls.

Finally there are important initiatives underway to provide a safe and effective education to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered students. For example, the Toronto District School Board provides a GLBT school option called the Triangle Program at the Oasis Alternative Secondary School. This full-time program offers students the structure, support and a community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight and transgender peers to obtain their high school education. While the climate of our schools has changed dramatically in recent years with the expectation that bullying and harassment not be tolerated for any reason, we must remain vigilant that all students are received in a welcoming and supportive manner in our schools.

It is up to us to ensure that education is delivered in the best possible manner under the best circumstances to meet the students’ needs. Our schools are filled with a variety of unique snowflakes and we must keep up with current research and fashion our curriculum delivery to meet our students’ abilities, differences and futures. We should not fear change if it will provide a better learning environment. Let’s hear it for the exceptionality of snowflakes!

---

**David Ritchie is a retired teacher from the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.**



# The Utility Player

Greg Dorey

**N**ew teachers often struggle to find a role for themselves in the ongoing support for students in their school community. In most schools, there seems to be a full and established roster of staff members coaching, volunteering and sharing their expertise and time in areas the new teacher would also like to contribute. How then can a teacher fit in and become a valuable member of their school community? For some teachers, this can be a challenge. Enter...the utility player.

On many teams and in many organizations one of the most valuable members is the utility player. This is a teammate who has a wide variety of skills and the ability to play several positions on the team. This person can be invaluable to an organization. This is the person who the coach or manager can count on to do their best and get the job done in whatever role they are needed and called upon to play.

The utility player often provides support in a wide variety of traditional offerings such as athletics, music and drama. Increasingly, utility players are finding – and often creating – other offerings as well, such as rock climbing and crafts. These teachers are drawing upon their own talents and interests and sharing, sometimes on a trial basis, those talents and interests. They invite students to try something new. If the activity proves popular, it continues; if not, at least the teacher has made a contribution by trying.

Sometimes students provide the impetus for a new activity. A few years ago, I stepped up as a utility player when several students who knew that I liked to work out before or after school asked me to supervise them in the fitness centre. It was a win/win situation. The students were supported in

something that interested them, I was doing something that I enjoyed, and we became part of the larger school community by making the fitness centre a place for students to get together to share and develop common interests and talents.

More recently I have started an after-school craft club. Again, drawing on my own interests and in response to a request by students, I find myself with another excellent opportunity to support students.

Teams, organizations and schools all need utility players. I have worked with many great teammates throughout my school career. They inspire me to be better. If that means as a utility player, so be it. I am happy to fill that role. It provides me the opportunity to work with students in a variety of ways and

contribute to the spirit of the school.

The utility player. Every team needs them. Every organization needs them. And of course, every school needs them. The time is now to step up as a utility player for your students. They will thank you for it.

*“It provides me the opportunity to work with students in a variety of ways and contribute to the spirit of the school.”*

---

Greg Dorey teaches Mi'kmaq studies and Grade 10 math at West Kings District High School, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.

# Unions Need to Go Back to School

*Ben Sichel*

**S**tudents are not being taught the relevance of organized labour.

Pop quiz: Can you name three workplace benefits won by Canadian unions in the past century? What are some of the biggest labour organizations in Canada? What is the Rand formula?

If you're a history teacher or a regular *Aviso* reader you might be able to answer questions like these. But if you're an average Canadian high school student, that's likely not the case.

When young people enter the workforce for the first time, they generally know little about the organizations that fought for such benefits as maternity leave, paid vacation time, workers' compensation, and the weekend. And yet, about 30 per cent of them will go on to become union members, according to current figures on union density in Canada (a number that has been dropping steadily from a high

of 38 per cent in the 1980s).

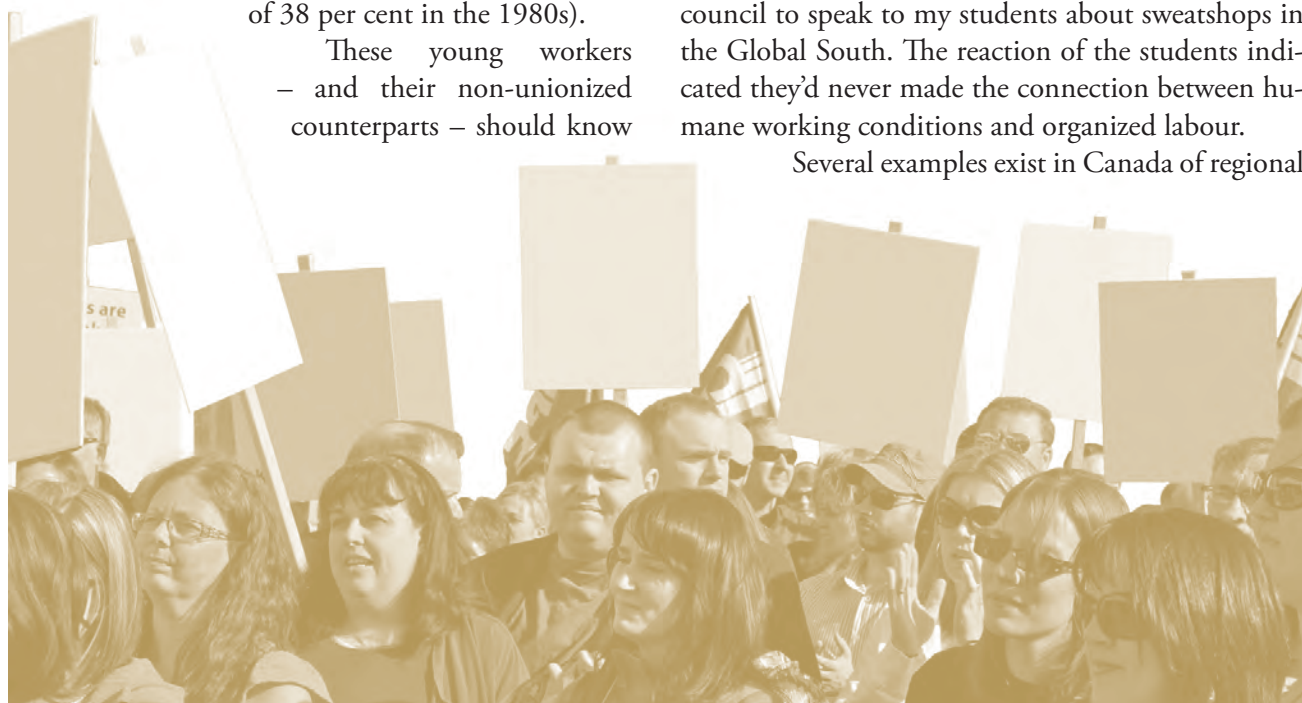
These young workers – and their non-unionized counterparts – should know

the basic facts about unions: that they lead to higher wages, better working conditions and more job security. However, given the relentless, effective, and ongoing right-wing assault on unions in recent decades, they might well be more inclined to view unions with indifference, or even suspicion.

Here's where unions themselves have a role to play. As the only major organizations with the resources and self-interest to make it happen, labour organizations can develop large-scale educational programs for high schools to help teach young people about the role of unions in society, and to put a human face on organized labour. The programs could be geared toward relevant classes such as history, trades and business.

I once invited the president of our local labour council to speak to my students about sweatshops in the Global South. The reaction of the students indicated they'd never made the connection between humane working conditions and organized labour.

Several examples exist in Canada of regional



labour organizations taking relatively small steps into public schools. The Toronto and York Region Labour Council recently developed a presentation aimed at high school classes called *How Have Unions Helped Us?* (available for viewing online). Both Quebec's and B.C.'s labour federations have well-developed youth education programs dealing with worker rights as well as health and safety. And labour-affiliated workplace safety programs exist in all three Prairie provinces.

Individual unions have also joined the game. The United Food and Commercial Workers Canada runs a program called *Democracy @ Work*, which the union estimates has reached more than 10,000 students since 2001. The Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) has also run a variety of school-based labour education programs, which at one point reached 125,000 students across Canada each year according to CAW's national coordinator of health, safety, and environment, Ken Bondy.

To put those numbers in perspective, however, consider that there are about 700,000 high school students in Ontario alone. Clearly, hundreds of thousands of Canadian students are graduating without any first-hand interactions with organized labour.

Some within the labour movement argue that unions are the wrong organizations to be taking the lead on labour education in public schools. Dr. Alan Hall, director of labour studies at the University of Windsor, runs a program where students in his department deliver presentations on labour laws and workers' rights to local high-school classes. Hall says the program has become so popular that he no longer needs to promote it. He attributes its success partly to the fact that it doesn't come from unions directly. "A lot of teachers just aren't interested in bringing the unions in," says Hall.

Indeed, unions are certainly sensitive to charges of being "too political" in class-

room presentations. "We don't want to go into schools and tell people who the best party is for them," says Ken Bondy of CAW. Similarly, the Quebec Federation of Labour's guidelines for classroom presenters warn against the "self-promotion" of unions in the classroom.

Certainly, our unions have room to improve on many fronts, and anything presented to students should be fair game for criticism.

It's worth noting, however, that business-friendly entrepreneurship programs like Junior Achievement (JA), sponsored by a who's who of corporate giants, are routinely welcomed into classrooms without a second thought – this despite the fact that students are many times more likely to make a living as a waged or salaried worker than as a business owner.

"There certainly is a need to counter all the anti-union stuff that [students] tend to hear," says Hall. "High school curriculums don't really address labour history in a meaningful way."

And it's hard to imagine who else but unions themselves would have the resources and the organizational depth necessary to take on an educational campaign of the scope needed to counter pervasive anti-union sentiment in the corporate media.

However they choose to do it, unions need to get their message into schools – and soon.

*A version of this article first appeared in Briarpatch magazine.*

---

**Ben Sichel teaches social studies and foreign languages at Prince Andrew High School, Halifax Regional School Board.**

*“Clearly, hundreds of thousands of Canadian students are graduating without any first-hand interactions with organized labour.”*

# Points to Ponder

Meg Ferguson

**E**very class and every kid feels like a combination lock, don't they? You try different combinations of strategies and approaches until the right combination lets you in. The most successful strategies I have used in the last 10 years of teaching are listed below. Please feel free to try, tweak, modify and use what might work for you.

## It already is

The number one survival tip for teachers: students will rise (or fall) to expectation.

In *Teach Like A Pirate: Increase Student Achievement, Boost Your Creativity, and Transform Your Life as an Educator*, author Dave Burgess explains that you can change your state (and then that of your class) with the "act as if" principle. He states: "Unlike passion, enthusiasm can be faked!"

The first week with any group, set the tone right away in keeping with this principle: "Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_ class! So excited to have you in this amazing place. You will find that people really focus on the positive here! We look out for each other, help each other, ask each other for help, and you may end up the expert on some-

thing else to return the favour."

## Circle of Power

This concept started in music class; students perform and receive feedback. There is no pressure of being marked. Audience members write two yay's and a suggestion for each performer. Five students may share one

of their comments. (The first time introducing this, you can use YouTube examples of successful performances and ones with obvious needs. Then follow with a discussion!) The feedback is helpful for final performance; students become accustomed not only to performing, but also in how to deal with nervousness through experience.

This can be done with poetry in English class, definitions in math and verbs in French class. It's great for reviews too.

This celebration of all successes, no matter how small, helps students to feel more knowledgeable and supported by their peers.

## Support networks

This is also known as group work. There are so many variations of this one: strategically created or not; with or without roles; with or without team names; organized by level, height, birthdate, alphabetically, or drawn from a hat. Create excitement! Remind them that there will be a new group next week if they are jiving with today's.

## Adoption

Some of the best collegial moments in my classes are when I approach a student subtly and quietly ask them to "adopt" someone because that student needs help or is new to class or is sitting alone. This strategy works every single time. The adopter feels good about doing good, the adopted

*This values  
their voice,  
their needs and  
their ideas.*



student feels supported. This can also be done with instruments, pre-existing groups, or even between grades, (“Adopt a Grade 7 Day.”)

### **Next time I would...**

Feedback from students can be invaluable. I ask for feedback after big activities or units, and always at the end of a course. I’ll ask, “What did you like?”, “What helped the most?”, “What was most annoying?”, “Any requests?” Compile the information your students provide and use it. When you do, remember to acknowledge your students. “Thanks for the great idea that inspired today’s lesson,” or “Some of you really liked this, so we’re going to do it today,” or “For those who don’t like this, next time we’ll do your favorite.”

This values their voice, their needs and their ideas and can inspire more of your own.

### **Imagination**

From time to time, throw your class a creative hook – transform your classroom, take it on the road. Let their imaginations soar and let them dive into a lesson. In Sociology, we turned the classroom into a surprise traditional Sri Lankan New Year’s party, we transformed music class into an art gallery, and a hallway into an African safari for African Heritage Month. Instead of reading it or watching it, they get to *be* there.

### **Acceptance and Appreciation**

When students create, dress or profess uniqueness, I try to admire it publicly. The next thing you know, students do the same! That atmosphere of acceptance and apprecia-

tion is beautiful. Celebrating excellence and improvement inspires more of the same.

### **Squash negativity**

This shall not exist in positive space. Show them the light.

### **Effective leadership**

Any expectation I have of a leader, I impose upon myself for my students. And when I bury myself in unnecessary tasks, it helps me focus through the piles to find what is most important. I let the students know from time to time the process I went through to create an experience, and that they are first on my professional priority list.

I let them know how excited I am about something we are doing – anticipation of the activity creates an “already is” great.

### **Summary**

It already is. Fake enthusiasm. Create student support networks. Solicit and embrace their ideas. Create a scene. Celebrate. Swat all gloom. Be the leader you were born to be.

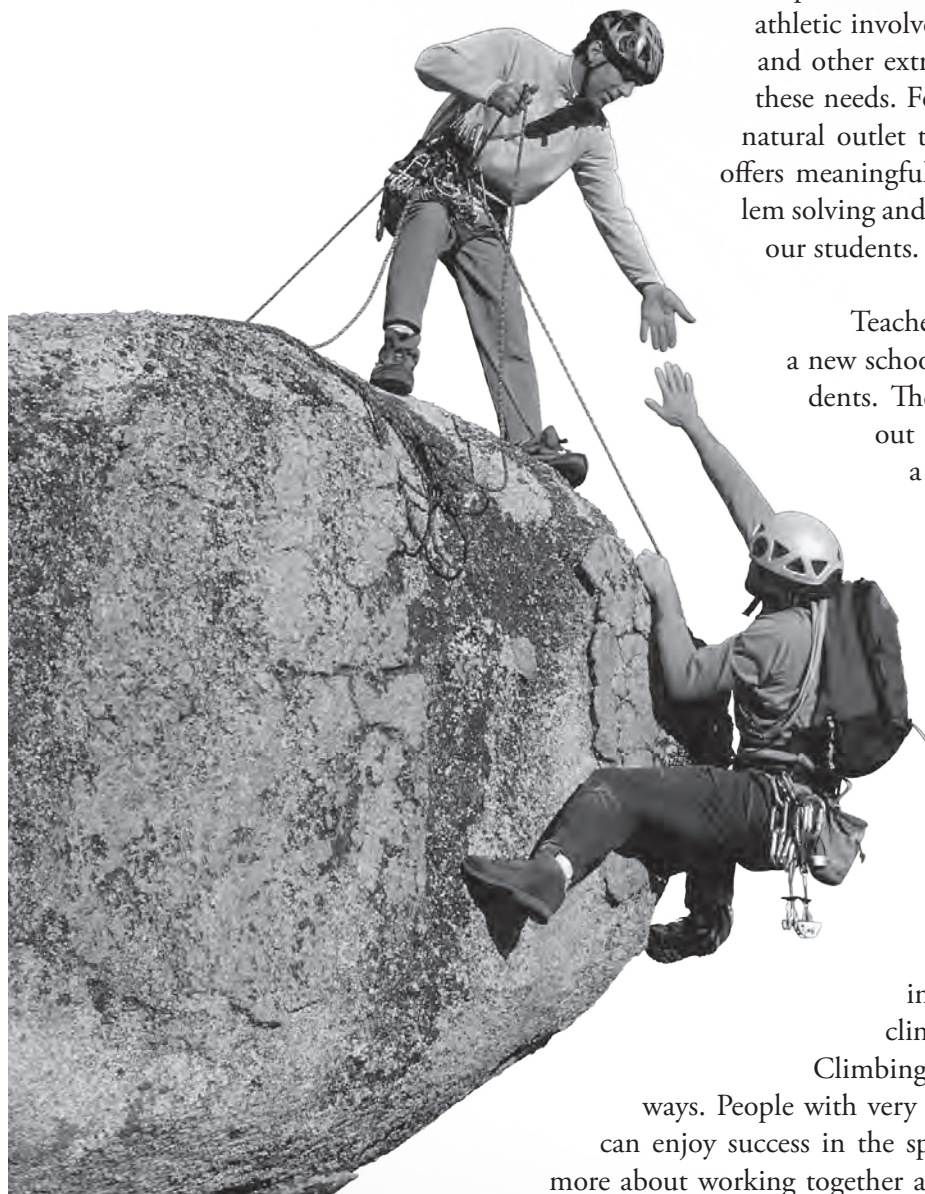
Meg Ferguson is a band, vocal, drumline, English and sociology teacher at Auburn Drive High School, Halifax Regional School Board, and is currently on leave as the president of Halifax County Local.

“  
*Celebrating  
excellence and  
improvement  
inspires more  
of the same.*”

# Climbing to Confidence

*Adam Conner*

**H**igh school has always been a place where some students struggle to fit in; to find their place in the community. So when I think about supporting students in education, I immediately think of the non-curricular ways in which teachers support their learners' needs. Some students struggle with acceptance and social skills; others seek guidance in their life path; others may need encouragement in athletic involvement. Often teachers use clubs and other extracurricular activities to support these needs. For me, climbing had provided a natural outlet to help my students succeed. It offers meaningful exposure to acceptance, problem solving and inclusion: all things that benefit our students.



Teachers trying to find their place in a new school face the same struggles as students. They have to find a way to stand out and be seen by the students in a different light beyond the walls of the classroom. When I arrived at West Kings District High School, the climbing wall provided me with my place. It was a natural fit for me as I had spent several years as a climber during my university days and had been thinking about re-introducing myself to it through the local climbing community. Once I got students involved in a climbing club I realized to what extent climbing could really help them.

Climbing is a unique sport in a lot of ways. People with very different builds and body types can enjoy success in the sport. Climbing has always been more about working together and enjoying nature in a unique

*“...it is important that we allow opportunities for our students to feel challenged, feel accepted, and feel success and failure – all in a safe setting.”*

way than about the competitiveness that normally accompanies athletic ventures. I believe the fact that almost anyone can experience success in climbing – along with its highly inclusive nature – enables students who have previously felt ostracized by other more competitive sports to finally feel like they have a place in the community.

The sport of bouldering is also becoming increasingly popular. Bouldering is a type of climbing in which participants climb large rocks or boulders found around local areas. As the sport developed, people started adding extra challenges by dictating which side of the boulder to climb, where to start, what parts of the boulder were allowed to be used and documenting these bouldering “problems” for others to attempt. Indoor bouldering is geared towards training for the outdoor sport. With indoor bouldering, problems are set and taped to allow students to see the path they need to take. They work with each other and within their own abilities to conquer the problem. Once a problem is completed, there are technical ways to improve on it and then move on to the next. This sport requires very little equipment: climbing shoes, chalk and a pad, making it a very inexpensive and therefore accessible sport for all students. Climb Nova Scotia has been an incredible resource of information regarding developed bouldering areas in Nova Scotia and in promoting safe use of land and safe climbing practices.

The students have found that bouldering requires good critical thinking skills, the ability to understand individual physical ca-

pabilities and limits and above all, cooperation and collaboration in helping each other overcome problems. While it is an individual sport when done competitively, training for outdoor bouldering is very much a group activity. It encourages people to work together and motivate each other, and to promote safe practices when climbing (both indoor and out).

I am working hard to promote the sport of bouldering across the province, particularly as a way to get young people outside for exercise and to work together to solve problems. My students and I have been preparing for an upcoming competition which is one of the first of its kind in the province. We will be playing host to students from across the province who wish to compete in a youth bouldering competition. We are hoping to see more events like this in the future which will depend on schools and teachers working hard to get the facilities in place to make climbing a realistic option for students in schools. As we continue to strive for excellence from ourselves and from our students, it is important that we allow opportunities for our students to feel challenged, feel accepted, and feel success and failure – all in a safe setting. I hope that climbing can be seen as a way to allow this to happen and that more students can benefit from such a positive sporting experience.

---

**Adam Conner teaches math and science at West Kings District High School, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.**

## at Angkor Wat

*Dr. Steven Van Zoost*

**S**o there I was at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, drawing with a beggar. He looked to be about seven – or eight-years-old. He was one in a group of kids that was milling among the tourists. Some were collecting discarded water bottles that they could exchange for candies. One boy carried a baby. A local guide told me that 80 per cent of Cambodians live in rural places and earn an average of \$40 a month. Thirty per cent of Cambodians live on less than 60 cents per day. The Canadian dollar goes a long way here. More than a million tourists a year tread through Siem Reap rejuvenating their weary feet with cheap foot massages, soaking their feet in tanks with nibbling piranhas, and skirting around the city in tuk-tuks or on the backs of elephants. The small boy in front of me had nothing to sell. He did not speak English. He smiled and waited.

Some languages are universal. With a small pad of hotel note-paper and an NSTU pen (you know – the one with the highlighter on the other end), I started to outline the silhouette shape of the peaks of the UNESCO site of Angkor Wat. I intentionally left out pertinent details. I handed the pen to the boy, and so began our joint drawing. More smiles as the boy added curly hair to a picture he drew of me.

Perhaps our smiles hid the deep differences in our economic statuses. I'm not suggesting that our smiles were not genuine – I just can't claim to know what thoughts were behind his smile. Perhaps he only thought of drawing details in the picture. Maybe he thought I'd pay him for his drawing. Maybe he thought I was ridiculously funny. Maybe he thought he was. I have no idea. I can tell you that behind my smile were complicated emotional responses to his simple sketches in front of me.

Regretfully, this was not my first encounter with

people far less financially fortunate than me. In truth, my first such recollection comes from my rural elementary school days. School is probably when most kids face their own differences. And school is probably where kids watch how teachers respond to such differences. As I watched this small Cambodian boy draw, I felt the teacher in me scrambling to respond to the differences between the two of us.

I am no expert in addressing the wide-scale effects of poverty. I have plenty of experiences in the slums of India, the favelas of Brazil, the informal settlements of South Africa, the sewer-dwellers of Mongolia...and the list, regretfully, goes on. I am embarrassed to admit that the notion of ending poverty is intangible for me to grasp during the constant shuffle of classes in and out my classroom door. Thankfully, some people and organizations have taken on this task. Still, I have to do something; I can't ignore that poverty walks through my classroom door too.





*...I have to do something; I can't ignore that poverty walks through my classroom door too.*

There is a well-used food bank in the community. My school has a breakfast program and the guidance counsellors are quietly helping students who can't access food for dinners at home. A teacher downstairs gratefully passes along winter jackets and boots to kids who she knows need them. But what is going on within my classroom? How can teachers respond to the issues that arise from poverty?

Teachers have much more to offer than their monetary responses to the concerns of poverty. For sure, our monetary contributions within our communities are needed. For sure, our volunteering within our communities is important. For sure, our responses to students in our classrooms living in poverty is critical.

I try to shift my thinking towards things that I can do for the students in front of me. For one, I tend to focus on another aspect of students lives. This is not to ignore their living conditions but to draw attention to what it is that I see in them as individuals rather than see in their situations. This may be as trite as a common interest in a movie character or as profound as an admiration for his or her self-understanding. Regardless, it is a genuine connection. This is not always easy, of course. I work at it. If I were completely frank with you, I'd tell you that I try and do this with all of my students and recognize that some students benefit from the connections that they have with their teachers more than other students. Of course, as I have claimed before, we are largely unaware of our influence.

We have a lot of influence over the kinds of representations that we put on offer to students in our classrooms. To some extent, we offer commentary about monetary values in our attire. Our jewellery, brand name clothing, and the personal technologies that we use at lunch can convey messages of financial success. Don't get me wrong: I am not unfashionable in my classroom. I am just conscious that students pay attention to what teachers value.

Teachers also convey their thinking about economic injustices, financial inequities and poverty in the kind of role models that are made available to students in our classrooms. Fiction and non-fiction both provide opportunities for students to think about their own lives in relation to others and to consider social responsibilities within and beyond our province.

There are more subtle ways of thinking about poverty and pedagogy. For example, we need to be sensitive to school tasks that require students to set goals or think too far beyond their immediate futures. For students who are worried about their next meal, asking them to think about setting goals for the end of the month may be beyond their day-to-day scope of thinking. In this way, schooling can become strangely disconnected from students' lives. Such tasks can thereby advantage kids who have experiences and environments that are conducive to planning, and disadvantage those who are unfamiliar or unable to look too far into their future.

My lucid ramblings about teaching in northeast Canada are seemingly a world away from Southeast Asia and the beggar boy drawing in front of me. I don't know anything about his life beyond this brief encounter. What difference can I possibly make in his day? A dollar goes a long way in Cambodia...will education too? I know we all face these kinds of questions and wonder what we have to offer. How will you respond to students who are living in poverty? How will you respond to a kid begging on the street? I decide to leave him with my NSTU pen, even when he follows me, offering to return it as he thought I had forgotten it. He offers me one of our drawings and I accept. Some languages are universal; his kindness, for example.

---

**Dr. Steven Van Zoost teaches in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.**

# Expanding Options and Opportunities for Boys and Girls

*Brian Forbes*

**R**emember 1955? It was the beginning of rock and roll and the middle of the coldest period of the Cold War. And although most did not realize it at the time, it was also the beginning of the end of an era – the social conventions and mores of which were soon to be challenged and radically transformed. (Being seven at the time, I was one of those who didn't quite see that coming!) Recently I happened to come across an educational video produced in 1955 that exemplifies one of the aspects of mid-century North American society that was soon to give way to irrevocable change.

The video features two high school girls, one of whom is trying to fit a home economics course into her class schedule. The other wonders why anyone would need home economics when everything a girl needs to know about becoming a good housekeeper can be learned from her mother. A fair statement of the video's point is that for girls, home economics is a much more practical choice than math or science. Neither of the girls questions the assumption that her obvious destiny is to become a wife and mother. It's just a matter of how best to acquire the requisite knowledge.

Of course the video is quite amusing to a 21st century viewer. Like the message, the clothing styles, hair styles and hokey dialogue are all equally passé. Yet in watching it I was reminded of an eye-opening experience I had in the early 90s when my oldest daughter was about seven years old. As I tucked her into bed I asked the timeless question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"A nurse," she replied.

My response was something like: "Why don't you think about being a doctor? Nurses work just as hard as doctors and don't get paid nearly as well." (Now I realize that answer may be open to criticism on more than one score. My only defence is that it was offered somewhat – but not entirely – facetiously.) Her eyes opened wide in amazement. "Girls can be doctors?" she said, completely seriously.

Now it was my turn to be astonished. Where had this little girl absorbed the obsolete (I thought) idea that girls are nurses and boys are doctors? Cer-

tainly not from her parents. Neither, I'm sure, from school. But somehow that toxic meme had survived with enough vigour to silently infect a seven-year-old's mind.

Taken together, these two scenarios raise a couple of points. The most obvious is the power and persistence of culturally imposed codes and presuppositions. Beyond that, it's hard not to think about the ambiguous role of education in the process of social change, at once conservative (passing on the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past and reinforcing cultural consensus) and progressive (serving as the vehicle for societally endorsed change). My daughter's belief concerning gender and the medical professions is a humbling reminder of the inherent limitations of both parental and educational influence in the endless competition of forces seeking to shape the minds and lives of young people.

Still, education (and parents) are very real forces in that endeavour, and not to be discounted by either advocates or opponents of change. It's easy to give an account of the role education has played in opening up options and opportunities for various segments of society that did not exist in 1955. It's also simple to spot the shortcomings of previous eras, and miss the imperfections of one's own. Sometimes I wonder what unrecognized stereotypes and agendas are being promoted, and what aspirations stifled, that education will be called upon to address in the future?

---

**Brian Forbes is a retired teacher and former president of the NSTU.**

# Teachers *Plus* Credit Union Offers...

## PROVINCE-WIDE ACCESS

Perform transactions at any Credit Union in Nova Scotia or at 60+ ABMs throughout the province. That is more than any other financial institution.

## 24 HOUR ACCOUNT ACCESS

Check balances, transfer funds, and pay bills using our online or telephone banking systems.

## COMPETITIVE RATES

Whether for mortgages, consumer loans, student loans, or personal line of credit, our lending department will help you get what you need.

## EXCELLENT SERVICE

As a member, you are also an owner of the Credit Union. We are there to help you and pride ourselves on our service.



**Membership Pays!**  
**The time to change is NOW!**



[www.teachersplus.ca](http://www.teachersplus.ca)  
Local: 902-477-5664  
Toll Free: 1-800-565-3103

16-36 Brookshire Court  
Bedford, NS B4A 4E9



Johnson Inc.  
Brokers/Consultants/  
Administrators

Unifund Assurance  
Company  
Underwriters

Medavie Blue Cross  
Underwriters

RSA Travel Insurance Inc.  
Service Provider

Manulife Financial  
Underwriters

SSQ Financial Group  
Underwriters

JOHNSON 

 MEDAVIE  
BLUE CROSS™

UNIFUND 

**SSQ** Financial  
Group

RSA 

 Manulife Financial  
| For your future™

NOVA SCOTIA TEACHERS UNION

# Group Insurance Plan