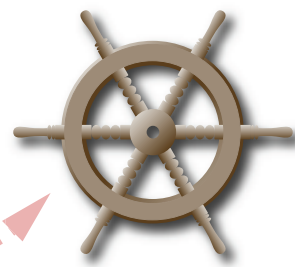


# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## What are we doing right?

By Ron Brunton, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Initiatives & Technology and Betty-Jean Aucoin, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

Teachers, parents, students and the public in general frequently hear about problems with public education in Nova Scotia. Our students can't read or they can't do mathematics or they don't understand about Canadian parliamentary democracy or they are bullies or any other failing. This is particularly disheartening for teachers because we all see in our students the potential for doing better and we agonize over the few students not able to do what they should at their age or grade level.

Far too often we only see the challenges and the difficulties, and we miss seeing what we are doing well. In Nova Scotia the glass is more than half full—we are doing much more right than we are doing wrong and we compare very favourably with many other jurisdictions.

One of the most important things shaping our approach to teaching and learning is the principle definition of public education as expressed in the Public School Program (PSP) through the Essential Graduation Learnings (EGLs) of Aesthetic Expression, Citizenship, Communication, Personal Development, Problem Solving and Technological Competence. These EGLs establish the philosophical framework for public education. When members of the NSTU professional development staff talk with educators from across Canada and the United States, many are envious of our foundation principles.

In the 1980s Nova Scotia began a major reorientation of public education. Prior to this, our school system only graduated a small percentage of the number of students who entered Grade Primary. We segregated learning abilities into streamed classes and significant mental and physical handicaps to separate institutions. We have discarded this in principle and, to a greater degree than most other jurisdictions in the world, in practice as well. The graduation rate is among the very best and we are meeting the educational challenges of a greater variety of special needs students more than ever. This does not mean that we have the resources to accomplish all we want in this regard or that no challenges remain. We all know there is more to be done, but the change we have witnessed and the transformation that has been achieved is extraordinary. It is an accomplishment teachers can celebrate with pride while with the same voice call for additional tools and resources to accomplish even more.

Nova Scotia teachers are developing assessment practices that incorporate both assessment *for* learning and assessment of learning that are significant primarily because there is recognition by all the partners in public education that these represent critical approaches to give all students the tools to take charge of their own learning. The large scale assessments produced by the Department of Education for Grades 3, 6 and 9 are unique among jurisdictions because their focus is to

assist teachers, schools, boards and the Department in supporting individual students' learning needs. Most other jurisdictions, most notably the United States with its No Child Left Behind Act, utilize large scale assessments to rank students, teachers and schools.

Although many teachers view these assessments as unwelcome intrusions into the time and focus of their efforts to encourage student learning, telling them nothing they didn't already know from classroom observation, the assessments are rooted in the curriculum and developed by Nova Scotia teachers and serve, at the very least, to validate teacher efforts and may also provide insight into the learning expression of some students. We can use these assessments to augment our efforts while the large scale norm-referenced assessment regime imposed across the United States has the demonstrable effect of exacerbating inequality and depriving schools and students of the resources they need.

Nova Scotia teachers are some of the best prepared teachers anywhere. We all know that teacher education programs cannot produce seasoned teachers complete with 25 years of experience on the first day they enter the classroom. Experience only comes with experience, as Yogi Berra might have said. In some places in the US, practice teaching involves pre-service teachers giving lessons to other pre-service teachers trying to role-play early elementary students. The practicum that makes up a major component of our BEd programs is one of the most extensive in the world and puts pre-service teachers in real Nova Scotia classrooms working with the PSP. Teacher education programs in Nova Scotia remain second to none and provide new teachers with as strong a foundation as possible.

NSTU staff members frequently encounter educators from other jurisdictions who either envy our emphasis, both philosophically and structurally, on a collegial relationship between administrators and classroom teachers or illustrate in their practice the pitfalls and barriers that accompany the contractual and conceptual segregation of the two.



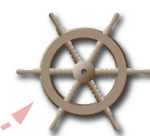
In Nova Scotia we have engaged all the education partners in a broad discussion of what professional learning for teachers must involve. There are many challenges ahead before we can realize what was articulated in the Education Professional Development Committee report. We do, however, have general agreement on where we need to go. We are also working on an instructional leadership program for principals that will provide a strong basis for principals to establish a collegial, professional, learning environment across the school in every school.

Some of the NSTU professional development staff recently had the

opportunity to attend the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) annual conference. What was most notable was how advanced we are in Nova Scotia. When we talked about what was happening in our province to colleagues from across the country and in the US, the vast majority were impressed, often in awe, of what we are doing. In the midst of all the challenges we face, and in our desire to do even more, we need to stop and recognize the extraordinary accomplishments we have achieved. The next time you hear or read about the crisis with our education system, smile and remember we are among the best in the world!

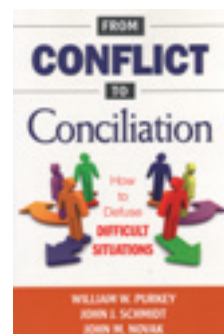


## Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Email your name, home address, and school or campus name with PD Giveaway in the subject line to [theteacher@nstu.ca](mailto:theteacher@nstu.ca) by May 3, 2010 to be eligible for the draw.

This month's PD giveaway is *From Conflict to Conciliation: How to Defuse Difficult Situations*, written by William W. Purkey, John J. Schmidt, and John M. Novak and published by Corwin. Conflict is inevitable, but educators can work together effectively if they understand how to defuse difficult situations before they escalate. This resource describes the Six-C process, a conflict resolution method that allows educators to progressively take more assertive steps as necessary to resolve disagreements. The Six-Cs are: Concern, Confer, Consult, Confront, Combat, and Conciliation. This approach helps readers handle challenging situations using the least amount of time and energy. *From Conflict to Conciliation* can be used in any situation, from the classroom to the community.



### Plan Your Class Trip this Year to the *Birthplace of New Scotland* Pictou, Nova Scotia



Students can stand on the deck of the replica tall ship that brought the first Scots to these shores at the Hector Heritage Quay & hear about their story in the Interpretive Centre onsite.

Offering....a unique, hands on educational experience and fully guided tours, you may even learn a little bit of Gaelic!

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

For more information or to book a tour for your class call Pictou Recreation, Tourism and Culture at 902-485-6057.