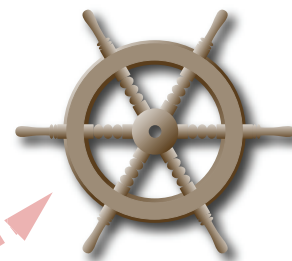


# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## Conference focuses on equity, social justice and peace

Equity, peace and social justice was front and centre when more than 150 Nova Scotia members converged at the *Peace...ing It Together* conference April 7 to 9 at the Delta Halifax.



*Ron Nugent presented his 21<sup>st</sup> Century Families workshop at the Peace...ing It Together conference.*

"The conference presented delegates with interactive, motivational and relevant sessions," says NSTU president Alexis Allen. "We wanted teachers to gain deeper insight and understanding, along with creative ideas, to support peace in their respective schools and communities."

The conference was organized by the NSTU's professional developments and equity committees and the Sheonoril Foundation to look at ways to promote peace in classrooms, on campuses and in communities.

Keynote speaker Dr. Samantha Nutt, founder and Executive Director of War Child Canada, congratulated delegates on their participation. "It's important you are taking on this challenge," she said. "We've all had teachers that have encouraged us to see beyond limitations."

With over 15 years experience helping children in war zones including Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Somalia, Nutt's stories of her work with women and children inspired the audience to make change.

"The keynote speaker is the most amazing individual I've heard at a conference in 36 years," commented one delegate. "I found Dr. Nutt moving, inspiring and informative. She has opened my eyes as a teacher, mother and citizen," commented another conference participant.

Dr. Nutt encouraged teachers to take the opportunity to effect change. "To support peace we need to challenge our assumptions

and encourage our students to act globally and locally," she says.

Nutt provided some practical advice for teachers in helping their students act in a socially just manner. "True social change begins with education."

Take the time to read one piece of international news a week, she says. War Child Canada ([warchild.ca](http://warchild.ca)) has resources to help keep teachers informed about the state of worldwide conflicts.

"If you care about people and development it's very important to give," she says. She also points out that change at a local level is attained through sustained consistent investment.

"You can change the world by changing the way you shop and invest, many organizations have ethical guidelines and frameworks, and it's important to ask the hard questions."

She encourages teachers to continue to give youth a voice. "It's more important than ever that kids learn to find their voices and that we steadfastly refuse them to be silenced."

The conference also featured 11 different concurrent workshops, allowing delegates the opportunity to attend four workshops throughout the weekend. Vice principal of Oxford School in Halifax Joe Morrison and Heather Harris principal at Kingston and District School presented *Creating a Climate of Peace in your School*. This workshop featured what both leaders have implemented at their schools through their involvement in Peaceful Schools International (PSI). "We have mentor groups instead of homerooms for the upper Grades," says Morrison. Each day the mentor groups spend 20 minutes on a particular topic of the day that's important to the students. The mentor groups are a mix of Grades 6 to 9 students. During the week of the conference, cyberbullying was an issue of concern for the mentor groups. "Teachers have been trying to create opportunities for relationship building," Morrison adds. "The PSI workshop had excellent presenters with great ideas who were very knowledgeable and approachable," said one delegate.

Another popular workshop was *21<sup>st</sup> Century Families* presented by Georges P. Vanier

guidance counsellor Ron Nugent. "Family is no longer the nuclear family that many of us grew up in," he says. "It's important to get to know your students' family circumstances and celebrate them. Students in your class need love and acceptance—they are not always getting it at home." Nugent uses his own story to demonstrate the power this can have on a child. Nugent and his husband adopted a son, and he is so grateful for his son's Grade Primary teacher who took the time to make him feel welcome and accepted. One delegate says, "A special thanks to Ron for finding his courage and sharing his wonderful story."



educator, but now I see how I am being an activist for social change," says Van Zoost.

One delegate said, "Dr. Steven Van Zoost—WOW, exciting and inspiring. It makes me want to start tomorrow."

Other workshops included *How to Tame a Bully*, *Digital Citizens—Appropriate Online*



*The NSTU sought artwork from students from around the province to adorn the walls and the tables for the conference. Above are students from Terence Bay School displaying some of their artwork.*

Dr. Steven Van Zoost, Advanced English teacher at Avon View High School presented a workshop on his Grade 12 students' *"realfriends" stop cliquing, start connecting: an Imagineaction project*. This social action project created a face-to-face social network, to help their school community become more social. Van Zoost says that his students felt the need to create such a project because they feel that with a growing dependency on technology to interact with one another has decreased the face-to-face interaction. The project received project money from the Canadian Teachers' Federation's Imagineaction program ([www.imagine-action.ca](http://www.imagine-action.ca)). "When I started as a teacher, I saw myself as an

*Behaviour, Restorative Practice, The Virtues Project, and Peace Through Art*. NSTU members from around the province presented almost all of the workshops.

"Our presenters are among the many exceptional educational leaders in our provincial classrooms—colleagues who have proven talent and expertise, and colleagues eager to share resources and strategies to address the needs of students at every age and education level," Allen says.

The conference also featured an Honour with Peace dinner with a 100-mile menu. "We're very pleased with the response we've received about this conference," concludes Allen.



*Betty-Jean Aucoin, Ruth Draper, Johnson Inc.; Bill Redden, Dr. Samantha Nutt, Alexis Allen, and Gérard Cormier are shown. Johnson Inc was a supporter of the conference.*



*Over 150 teachers attended the Peace...ing It Together conference.*