

THE MANITOBA

Teacher

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2014 VOLUME 92 NUMBER 4 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY



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President's Column

P. 4

Inside MTS

P. 5

P. 18

Smokeless tobacco

Young athletes naively believe snuff or dip are less threatening than cigarettes

MTS member poll: Stress tops class size concern

P. 7

French Immersion: A growing concern with growing pains

P. 8



P. 16

Meditation in the classroom

Before class, middle-years teacher Cari Satran of École Leila North Community School leads her students in a brief meditation



P. 11

Teachers and movies

Good teachers and bad teachers in film





PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

PAUL OLSON

We work hard to protect and strengthen our students. We work to build community, address bullying, impart skills and learning, all with the goal of helping kids become strong adults, full citizens, and people who can avoid some of the mistakes of the past.

And yet, we face many threats. The most horrifying are acts of extreme violence, but in truth we lose far more kids to quieter killers flowing from poverty and bad public policy than we do from TV-worthy drama.

It's an essential part of our professional paradigm that we focus on what we can control—our time, our effort, our practice—in the service of student welfare and learning. We can and do make important differences every day. Good teaching can be a great equalizer in a kid's life.

I'd argue, however, that if we really want to help our students then we need to hold back a reserve of time and energy, and become more political. Inequality is a defining challenge of our age.

It's fine and well to feed the hungry, find coats and mitts for the cold, and so on, but I think it also falls to us to demand answers about why our students are showing up—IF they show up—so battered and bruised in the first place.

Finland, in creating its world-leading education system, did not set out to create excellence. They had the wisdom to realize that excellence is not so much a goal as it is a result, and so they set out to create a highly equitable educational system. And they did so in a context of strong social supports.

Here in Canada, federal legislation such as C-377 and party platforms that attack unions are in the pipeline for passage already, and will hinder the ability of MTS and the Canadian Teachers' Federation to do their work. The Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) seems likely to undermine any number of education-related services currently provided by public education systems, and this may well include teachers themselves.

Alberta and Saskatchewan are already looking at contracting out the building of new schools, and leasing them from private companies at a cost greater than what it would cost to build the schools themselves. This money will drain away from kids and classrooms and toward corporate coffers.

Political decisions lead to housing allowances going up—or people continuing to choose between housing and food. Ditto school funding, after-school programs, childcare programs—or women and children continuing to be disproportionately affected by poverty. Professional autonomy—or canned programming from Pearson. Collective agreements that protect your working conditions—or attacks on the Rand formula and your right to organize.

My "ask" for 2014 is simple. Manitoba has 57 MLAs, and 14 MPs. Before this year is out, your MLA and MP should know your name, and what you believe in. Your voice is needed at least as much outside your classroom as in.



The Manitoba Teachers' Society

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INSIDE MTS

KEN PEARCE, GENERAL SECRETARY

Three times a year I get to attend the Canadian Teachers' Federation Directors Meetings, one of which is held immediately prior to the CTF Annual Meeting.

This coming year the Annual Meeting will be hosted by the Society in July. Your staff is currently working on the necessary preparations for hosting this event and it includes many logistical aspects that will involve the use of volunteers from the membership. To assist in this, a sub-committee of members and staff has been working to provide a memorable visit for CTF delegates from across the country. This work involves:

- Planning family activities and child care for partners and children who travel with delegates. Some examples include visits to the Assiniboine Park Zoo, Lower Fort Garry and Winnipeg Goldeyes games.
- Recruiting volunteers and arranging transportation for delegates arriving from across the country.
- Obtaining promotional items from local teachers' associations and others.
- Obtaining commemorative gifts for all delegates and alternates.
- Arranging local entertainment for the President's Reception July 11th at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.
- Organizing a Manitoba Night, taking the format of a mini-Folklorama, hosted at the Fairmont Hotel.
- Preparing participant packages.

Of course, working with the CTF staff involves more than organizing an event like this. It is part of an ongoing relationship with CTF. The Federation provides much needed information and soundly-researched data for our day-to-day operations at the Society. The following is just a sample of that work.

Research

CTF has a pan-Canadian network that is central to our policy analysts, allowing for ready consultation with affiliate staff to prepare researched data for informed statements on a myriad of issues that arise. These sometimes require a quick response by MTS political leadership and the sharing of information and experiences.

MTS is not an island; in addition to the episodic need to respond quickly, it is likewise important to track trends that may

be slowly emerging and gathering steam. Coordination and the sharing of long-term research into the type and delivery of education services across the country helps form Society responses to trends in education. For example, rapidly changing technologies and teachers' future role in the system are a current focus of research by CTF and its affiliates. Helping coordinate a national response to the anti-teacher/anti-union agenda is something that CTF is uniquely positioned to do and the joint work of staffs at affiliates is central to this process.

CTF's recent move to provide an upgraded electronic Education Research Library, both national and international in scope, and the opportunities for future collaborative research through the CTF's establishment of the National Teachers' Research Network offers significant promise for future collaboration.

International Programs

CTF staff routinely share reports from Project Overseas, which keeps the Society and CTF affiliates able to respond to questions from their members about overseas initiatives. This is especially important since the federal government cancelled supports through CTF's CIDA funded initiatives. Staff at affiliates and CTF plan biennial consultation meetings where staff officers from across Canada meet to discuss Project Overseas as well as the other development cooperation programs that CTF funds in partnership with its members. Consultation meetings providing information to members of the affiliates help them determine political decisions to be made. The Manitoba Teachers' Society provides

money and volunteer time every year to projects around the world through CTF. CTF staff prepares proposals, sends them to the Society and staff here prepares proposals for approval by the Provincial Executive.

Research and support for maternity leaves

CTF staff provided the research needed to support the MTS brief to the Minister on credit of service for maternity and parental leaves. There continues to be strong research supports to affiliates for their work in providing information to affiliate presidents and executives to ensure arguments for a socially just society are founded on informed debate on such issues. With such programs as Employment Insurance, Society stances are provided by national research as the Employment Insurance program is based on federal legislation; when there are problems, our staff often go to CTF staff for assistance.

Employment Insurance

CTF staff also organizes an Employment Insurance forum every few years for member organization staff to meet directly with Service Canada and EI staff to discuss issues.

Annual Staff Officer Meetings

Your Society staff is kept current on issues that are affecting teachers across Canada through the facilitation of networking among teacher organizations at the national CTF gathering of staff members.

This description of the kinds of collaboration between your Society staff and the Canadian Teachers' Federation hopefully illustrates the kind of work that is ongoing and supportive of the endeavours of the The Manitoba Teachers' Society in achieving its goals.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HELP WITH THE CANADIAN TEACHERS' FEDERATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MTS needs the help of Manitoba teachers in playing host to the CTF AGM July 7–11. Interested teachers should contact:

- MTS Vice-President Norm Gould, ngould@mbteach.org / (204) 888-7961 or
- MTS Assistant General Secretary Bobbi Éthier, bethier@mbteach.org / (204) 888-7961



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Stress tops class size concern

BY JUDY EDMOND

Job stress is now teachers' top concern in Manitoba, superseding class size, according to a poll conducted by MTS in November.

Each year, the Society engages a research company to field a telephone survey with a random sample of 800 Manitoba teachers. MTS asks teachers to name their biggest concern. They do not pick from a list—this is a top-of-mind choice. From 1999 onward, class size was their biggest concern; today it is job stress or too many demands.

Three focus groups held in mid-October 2013 with teachers from Dauphin and Winnipeg area teachers' associations hinted at this shift. These discussion groups were sponsored by MTS and moderated by an outside facilitator. While the information gathered was from a small sample of teachers, the discussions among teachers had a common theme. Six weeks into the new school year, both rural and urban teachers were overwhelmed.

At the start of the focus group, teachers were asked to illustrate their typical day. Describing her picture, one teacher said, "That's me in the middle... things are whirling around me, everyone is asking me to do things... this group of students is off on their own, this one is refusing to take part and these ones are all around me... coming at me with demands." Another said, "I feel overwhelmed every day... and it's getting worse... I wonder, can I handle it?"

Teachers believe too much of their time is spent on activities outside of teaching. "I would like to spend more time with the kids, teaching the kids... but I am expected to maintain a web page, post marks for parents, answer e-mails everyday... there is less and less time for teaching," said one participant.

In addition, teachers said new approaches to teaching, changes in curriculum and new responsibilities that are not properly planned burden teachers without necessarily improving education.

Teachers expressed frustration because students are being moved grade to grade without mastering the requirements of each grade. "We are just pushing kids through... I have a kid in Grade 8 who reads at a Grade 2 level... we are not helping that child and there are so many like him."

The teachers also stated that too many parents mistake abuse of teachers for advocacy of their children. "The parents think they are being their children's advocate, but they are abusive... bullying is such a big thing now, but a lot of these kids get it from their parents... if you are raised by a bully it's not a big surprise if you turn out to be one." One teacher dubbed them "Blackhawk parents", helicopter parents whose goal is to get a teacher fired.

Teachers said they want to be treated with respect as people and professionals with individual teaching styles. One teacher even suggested that every school be required to post a sign telling visitors that verbal or physical abuse of staff is not tolerated, similar to hospitals and doctors' offices. When asked about this idea in the telephone survey, three out of four teachers think it is important that MTS work to have every school in Manitoba post such a sign.

How should MTS help teachers address job stress? Teachers want the emphasis to be on the prevention of mental health crises. The support should be there before problems hit the crisis point, they said. Participants in the focus groups believe teacher wellbeing should be the Society's chief function. "It is the most important thing they do... we need them for that and they help lots of people."

	% OF TEACHERS								
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009*	2010*	2012*	2013*
Too many demands, job stress	12	12	11	14	15	16	15	13	16
Class size/Too many students	19	16	15	15	18	17	17	15	13
Student behavior, discipline, violence	14	13	14	17	12	10	10	9	9
Classroom composition/ Effect of special needs students	6	6	3	3	6	6	10	6	9
Lack of support/Resources for teachers	7	6	6	6	4	3	8	10	8
Assessment procedures and policies/ No fail educational system					4	3	7	4	7
Students' needs not being met/ Lack of support	7	5	5	5	7	7	5	6	6

*Principals not part of survey

FRENCH IMMERSION: A GROWING CONCERN WITH GROWING PAINS

BY MIREILLE THERIAULT

The future of French Immersion in Manitoba appears brighter than ever with enrollment topping 20,000 for the third year. But that growth has also meant a growth in problems.

No longer considered part of an enriched experience mainly for high-achievers, more parents are recognizing the benefits of the program from brain development to future job prospects for their children.

“Clearly the state of French immersion in Manitoba shows positive signs,” says Philippe LeDorze, Past President of ACPI, l’Association canadien des professeurs d’immersion. “One thing we need to know about the French immersion program in the province is that 95 per cent of all children started the program in kindergarten or Grade 1 which clearly makes immersion a non-elitist program in Manitoba.”

Simon Normandeau, President of the ÉFM, Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones du Manitoba, says much of the increase is coming from second-generation Anglophones who have experienced the benefits of French Immersion themselves. And there has been growth in areas outside Winnipeg such as Winkler, Morden and Stonewall.

“Traditionally there’s been a tendency to hold back French Immersion in those areas. That is no longer the case and it’s fantastic. The other large part of the increase is newcomers to Canada. Presented with the opportunity to learn this new country’s two official languages, they go about doing just that. It’s part of the school system. It’s provided to them, so why wouldn’t they seize that opportunity?”

Over the past 10 years growth has come at a slow and steady pace yet to hit five per cent from one year to the next but resources are stretched and as positive as continued enrollment may be, increased demands may be hard to meet much longer before the program suffers.

“Because the numbers keep going up people tend to think that everything is go-

Simon Normandeau, President of the ÉFM

ing fine in French immersion. Everything is not fine,” says Normandeau. “Yes, the program is working, but often people, including politicians, stop right there and don’t look any further than those statistics.

“Our members tell us they are in need of resources and support at the divisional level. Yes, there are pedagogic counselors but they are not necessarily dedicated to French. The department of languages includes French, but also Spanish and German and so their mandate is huge and the needs of many organizations are dire.”

Adequate opportunities to ‘live’ the language through cultural events and exchanges, especially for students and teachers in more remote areas, accessing support services for students and curbing the drop in immersion enrollment from Grades 9 to 12 are some of the challenges to the program. But by far the biggest concern is the ability of many school divisions to recruit and retain qualified

French Immersion teachers. The equation of supply and demand is definitely skewed.

“It is big enough of a problem that it could slow progress of the French immersion program because at some point some schools just give up in finding those teachers,”

says Normandeau. “The funny thing is if you go to Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, they don’t have enough positions available for their new teachers. There is immigration of these teachers towards the West, but it seems that our province isn’t getting its share. They tend to go to Alberta and Saskatchewan so we need to find a way to attract them to our province.”

With at least five or six universities in Quebec and the Maritime provinces offering education programs in French he says it’s really a matter of connecting the dots and building a link between the people hiring teachers and where those teachers are. And if recruiting teachers isn’t hard enough, then retaining them can be. Normandeau says some studies show between 30 to 45 per cent of teachers in their first five years won’t stay in the profession because of the large workload. The challenge is compounded further when trying to fill positions in rural or remote communities and in speciality areas of math and science.

While he agrees that there are challenges, Jean-Vianney Auclair, Assistant Deputy Minister with the Bureau de l’éducation française Division says he is cautious about referring to the need for more qualified French Immersion teachers as a pronounced shortage.

“We know that in immersion we have some unique circumstances where it is difficult for school divisions to find teachers. Yet, we have a good French Immersion program in the North; the Thompson area, Swan River and Dauphin. And we know that staff turnover in these areas tend to be higher because often people begin their careers in the north and then move on to an urban area when they have a few years of experience. I think that we know that even within the English program, finding a maths specialist to teach in a rural community in Manitoba may be a bit of challenge.

“That being said, I’m not saying that this is not something we shouldn’t be paying attention to. Quite the contrary. We have had conversations in the past with the Faculty of Education at the University of St. Boniface to discuss this matter.”

LeDorze, agrees that the local teacher education program is not up to meeting that particular challenge.

“The University of St. Boniface has room for 50 graduates per year in its

Education programs and currently for the next two years they are only at about 65 per cent. There are 33 potential graduates this year and 33 the next. That is clearly insufficient in meeting the needs to have highly qualified immersion teachers.

“If you’re a young person coming out of high school and you’re fluent in both languages and looking for career options, becoming an immersion teacher is certainly a possibility. Even if you teach in an English school, being able to teach your own basic French is an asset. All of our teachers should be able to do that right now. That would be very helpful for all our learners of French regardless of what program they are in.”

Auclair says, “The future of the French Immersion program is already under reform as it moves towards a priority of oral proficiency and literacy. We’ve examined the question of whether we are really achieving our goal to make those students fluently bilingual by the end of Grade 12.”

Another issue, stemming the pronounced drop from the program in Grades 9 to 12 creates a Catch-22 situation. Lower enrollment leads to reduced need for teachers, but faced with perceived shortfalls in the quality and variety of courses available to students in Grades 9 to 12, parents who vigorously sought French Immersion for their kids seem to get a case of cold feet just when they may be in a position to parlay their bilingualism into greater opportunity in post-secondary education or the job market.

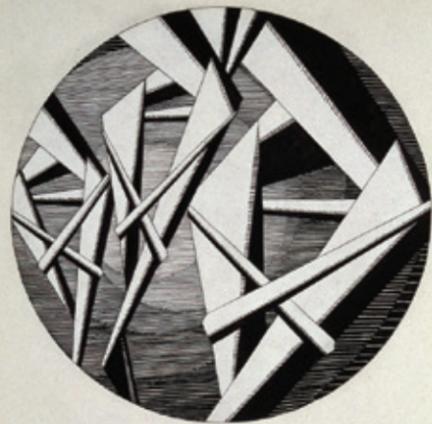
“We have been working with our partners; the WNCP, Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, other ministries of education and partners in education to have a look at the foundation of what we do. We have a new framework and our intent is to start slowly but surely, revising the curriculum in Manitoba based on these issues,” says Auclair.

“We want to increase our focus on literacy so from a French perspective this would apply to both the Français program and the French Immersion program. We’d also like to examine to what extent students identify themselves as bilingual learners. The whole question of identity is very much present in French as a first language environment, but to some extent we also believe that there is some application to the French as a second language.”

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Bertram Brooker, *Lesser Orbits*, c. 1927.

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10. Good Will Hunting

9. Coach Carter

8. Lean on Me

7. Stand and Deliver

6. Bad Teacher

5. Dangerous Minds

4. Freedom Writers

3. Dead Poets Society

2. Mr. Holland's Opus

1. To Sir With Love

THE TOP 10

TEACHER MOVIES
FROM THE MTS MEMBERS' POLL

Good TEACHER

TEACHER

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

FROM TOP: Stills from *Blackboard Jungle*, *Bad Teacher* and *To Sir with Love*

Well, what is it with young teachers today, eh? There was a time teachers, taking a break from the times tables and fiddling with the film projector, to huddle down at the local Bijou and gaze with affection at the latest Hollywood depiction of teaching.

There was Sidney Poitier, as Mark Thackeray, in *To Sir With Love* gaining the respect and admiration of a school full of recalcitrant thugs and assorted delinquents. In following years there was Morgan Freeman winning the respect and admiration of a school full of thugs malcontents and then Michelle Pfeiffer winning the respect and etc. etc.

Teachers loved those movies—and still do.

Just for fun, the annual members' poll for MTS asked what movie about teaching was our members' favourite. By a huge margin, teachers over the age of 53 named *To Sir With Love*. That

was followed by the heart warmers *Mr. Holland's Opus* and *Lean on Me*.

But among teachers between 24 and 34, they liked *Dangerous Minds*, *Freedom Writers* and *Bad Teacher*.

Yes, *Bad Teacher*, Cameron Diaz as quite possibly the worst teacher ever portrayed on film. Her turn as Elizabeth Halsey makes TV's Mr. D (see page 14) seem like Socrates. Back in 1967 she would have been one of Mark Thackeray's students.

Unlike earlier movies about teachers, mainly featuring classrooms out of control and eventually reforming, *Bad Teacher* featured a teacher out of control and eventually reforming. Or, maybe not. There is a sequel in the works.

There were many teachers offended by the movie, but it did take another step away from the staple of movie education, the good teacher.

Richard Rand, a theatre professor at Purdue University says teachers are "usually portrayed in a way that makes us all wish we had those kinds of teachers. And as teachers, we often wish we were those

teachers and had the perfect answers at our fingertips."

Well, that may have been right about Glen Ford, when he was gaining the respect of his class of thugs in *Blackboard Jungle*, but what of Ms. Halsey, who is drunk in school, has drugs in her drawer and throws things at students?

Apparently the answer is still yes.

Teacher-blogger Pat Brothwell says, "I found it therapeutic in a sick way. Who hasn't wanted to throw a dodgeball at a kid who made their life a living hell or tell a sanctimonious co-worker to 'blow me' without repercussion? Just me? Well, I enjoyed living vicariously through that movie and watching Cameron Diaz do and say all the things professionalism stops me from doing."

And, well, she did become a good teacher in the end.

Mary Dalton, author of *The Hollywood Curriculum: Teachers in the Movies*, says there has been a complete cycle of movies featuring the good teacher.

"Typically he or she is an outsider who is not well liked by other teachers, who are typically bored by students, afraid of students or eager to dominate students. The good teacher gets involved with students on a personal level and does not usually fare very well with administrators."

The images of teachers in movies influence how the general public views teachers and teaching

That's a bit of an understatement. The good teachers in movies usually have great clashes with evil administrators who care only about rules and budgets and discipline. Good principals have to fight the same battle with evil school board members and superintendents. There are no movies about good school board members and superintendents.

Dalton says the appearance of movies that parody the good teacher or give it a twist, like *Election*, *High School High* or *School of Rock*, just shows how established the genre has become.

"Clearly parody and revisionism cannot exist unless it is conceded that a basic form exists. With the release of these films, the cycle of good teacher movies as a genre is complete."

Or, it's just a continuation. *Bad Teacher* becomes good in the end. Jack Black becomes a good teacher in *School of Rock* and *Election*'s bad teacher, Mathew Broderick, becomes, well, a tour guide at the American Museum of Natural History.

And going from teaching to tour guide for the bad teacher is better than many movies in which failures and burnouts in other fields go into teaching.

Sidney Poitier's Thackeray was an unemployed engineer, *Dangerous Mind*'s Michelle Pfeiffer an ex-marine and Tom Berenger's *The Substitute* an ex-mercenary. *Indecent Proposal* ends with Woody Harrelson and Demi Moore going back to teaching after failed attempts to gamble their way to prosperity.

What's the message there?

"*Indecent Proposal* portrays teaching as accessible to anyone even without a reasonable skill or subject to impart," says Prof. Dale Bauer, in a paper entitled *Indecent Proposals: Teachers in the Movies*. "Perhaps this is just another example of how so many English majors-turned-Hollywood screenwriters get revenge on teachers who failed them."

Whether anyone should care how teachers and teaching are portrayed on the big and small screen is still an open debate.

Some researchers say that the images of teachers in movies do influence how the general public views teachers and teaching.

"Moviegoers young and old carry with them (movie images) when they go to school each day," said an article in *Education World*. "Many teachers, both newbies and vets, credit the films *To Sir With Love*, the *Blackboard Jungle* and *Up the Down Staircase* with inspiring their career choice." (That was before the release of *Bad Teacher*.)

Author Dalton agrees.

"General knowledge about the relationships between teachers and students, knowledge beyond the scope of the personal or anecdotal, is created by constructs of popular culture played out in the mass media."

In other words, movies have an influence; what we know about school we know from the movies.

If that's so, there must be a lot of people out there who think school classrooms are filled

with gang members, every class is about eight minutes long and every field trip is a life-changing experience (usually done without permission).

But, overall, teachers look pretty good. For the most part, in the dozens and dozens of movies about them, the main characters at least are portrayed in a positive light, if not a total halo.

That is, except for the poor phys ed teacher.

That was the finding of university professors Bryan McCullick, Don Belcher and Brent and Marie Hardin who analyzed hours of movies in which physical education teachers were featured.

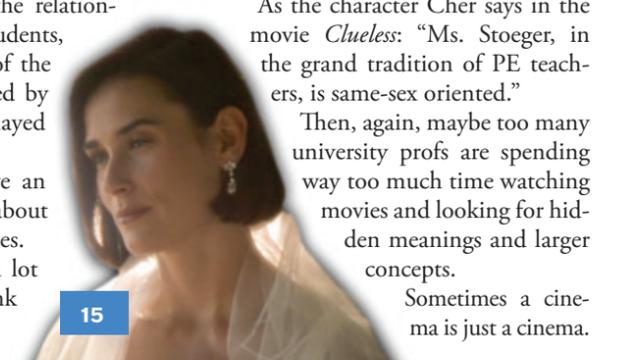
They saw phys ed teachers portrayed as dimwitted, uneducated bullies. Male phys ed teachers are most often depicted as "hormone-raging" heterosexual buffoons, apparently recruited from boot camps in the sixth circle of hell."

Their female counterparts are portrayed as "butch lesbians", normally bedecked in baggy clothes and bad haircuts.

As the character Cher says in the movie *Clueless*: "Ms. Stoeger, in the grand tradition of PE teachers, is same-sex oriented."

Then, again, maybe too many university profs are spending way too much time watching movies and looking for hidden meanings and larger concepts.

Sometimes a cinema is just a cinema.



100 ACTING TEACHERS

- | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| 1. Jon Stewart <i>The Faculty</i> | 13. Sidney Poitier <i>To Sir With Love</i> | 26. Tom Berenger <i>The Substitute</i> | 38. Sean Connery <i>Finding Forrester</i> | 50. Michael Chiklis <i>High School</i> | 62. Francois Truffaut <i>L'Enfant Sauvage</i> | 75. Jon Voight <i>Conrack</i> | 89. Jami Gertz <i>Fighting the Odds: The Marilyn Gambrell Story</i> |
| 2. Michael Douglas <i>Wonder Boys</i> | 14. Eve Arden <i>Grease</i> | 27. Joan Cusack <i>School of Rock</i> | 39. William Hurt <i>Children of a Lesser God</i> | 51. Thomas Haden Church <i>Easy A</i> | 63. Donald Sutherland <i>Animal House</i> | 76. Bette Davis <i>The Corn is Green</i> | 90. Julia Roberts <i>Mona Lisa Smile</i> |
| 3. Barbra Streisand <i>The Mirror Has Two Faces</i> | 15. Demi Moore <i>Indecent Proposal</i> | 28. James Belushi <i>The Principal</i> | 40. Michael Cain <i>Educating Rita</i> | 52. Elliot Gould <i>American History X</i> | 64. Tia Carrere <i>My Teacher's Wife</i> | 77. Nathan Lane <i>The English Teacher</i> | 91. Laura Dern <i>October Sky</i> |
| 4. Michelle Pfeiffer <i>Dangerous Minds</i> | 16. Mel Gibson <i>The Man Without A Face</i> | 29. Nick Nolte <i>Teachers</i> | 41. Mark Harmon <i>Summer School</i> | 53. Helen Mirren <i>Teaching Mrs. Tingle</i> | 65. Adrien Brody <i>Detachment</i> | 78. Judy Dench <i>Notes on a Scandal</i> | 92. Julianne Moore <i>The English Teacher</i> |
| 5. Robin Williams <i>Dead Poets Society</i> | 17. Richard Dreyfuss <i>Mr. Holland's Opus</i> | 30. Arnold Schwarzenegger <i>Kindergarten Cop</i> | 42. Judd Hirsch <i>Teachers</i> | 54. Samuel L. Jackson <i>Coach Carter</i> | 66. Ed Harris <i>Radio</i> | 79. Tim Meadows <i>Mean Girls</i> | 93. Stellan Skarsgard <i>Good Will Hunting</i> |
| 6. Meg Ryan <i>In the Cut</i> | 18. Janet Jackson <i>Nutty Professor II</i> | 31. Kevin Kline <i>In & Out</i> | 43. Kirstie Alley <i>Summer School</i> | 55. Billy Bob Thornton <i>School for Scoundrels</i> | 67. David Hyde Pierce <i>Wet Hot American Summer</i> | 80. James Woods <i>The Virgin Suicides</i> | 94. Famke Janssen <i>The Faculty</i> |
| 7. Jack Black <i>School of Rock</i> | 19. Stephen Colbert <i>Strangers With Candy</i> | 32. Kevin Spacey <i>Pay It Forward</i> | 44. Anne Bancroft <i>The Miracle Worker</i> | 56. Matthew Broderick <i>Election</i> | 68. Jeremy Piven <i>Old School</i> | 81. Lisa Kudrow <i>Easy A</i> | 95. Christina Hendricks <i>Detachment</i> |
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| | | | | | | 88. Cameron Diaz <i>Bad Teacher</i> | |

CANADA'S WORST TEACHER (WE HOPE)

BY PAT ST. GERMAIN

Gerry Dee is telling more tales out of school.

Ten years after he parlayed his teaching experience into a full-time comedy career, Dee says he's keeping it real as the blockhead of the class in CBC sitcom *Mr. D*.

"I'm saying things we've often thought of as a teacher, or we've secretly done. And there's this myth out there that teachers are perfect and they would never do any of this stuff. Well that's not the case," he says.

"There's a lot of truth to the show that I think a lot of teachers may not like, but I'm exposing it—and I can expose it 'cause I did it."

Dee shot the third season of the series at a Halifax high school this summer and it will begin airing February 24th. The comedy is ramped up for TV, but the fictional timeline mirrors his real-life career trajectory at a private school in Toronto, where he moved from academics to gym class.

"My first three years teaching was in the social sciences and I literally had no idea what I was doing," he says. "I'm not a well-read person. It's not something I ever really got into was reading... so for me to teach those subjects, which are very based on knowing your history and reading, I was out of my element."

Hence *Mr. D*'s propensity for calling on students to use *Les Misérables* to explain the Industrial Revolution, and asking them what caused the Renaissance.

"That to me is one of the more clever lines, a very subtle line in Season 1—'What caused the Renaissance?' You have to be pretty clever to get that because if you just let it fly by you miss it, you miss the joke, but a lot of teachers would get it," he says.

"If everyone else gets on board that's awesome—and they have. But I write it for teachers. I want teachers to like it. I want teachers to laugh. I want teachers to say it's real, and any time the writers pitch me something that's not real to teaching I say no."

For example, if a kid should be in class, writers can't pull him out to service a scene. And Dee says he'd never allow some of the antics in shows like the Cameron Diaz movie *Bad Teacher*, which is being spun into a CBS series this fall.

"It's not my kind of show because it's not real. Like a teacher going up to a kid and smacking him in the face in the hall. Yeah, it might be fun for a comedy, but it would never happen—never. So I would say, 'No, that's not the industry, that's not the profession.'"

Of course, the fictional Xavier Academy is populated by larger-than-life characters: An enigmatic janitor, a crafty secretary (comedian Bette MacDonald), a quirky science guy, the by-the-book rookie teacher Miss Mason, *Mr. D*'s popular rival Mr. Dwyer (hip-hop star Maestro Fresh Wes) and ambitious vice-principal Mr. Cheeley, played by teen talk-show veteran Jonathan Torrens (Jonovision).

But Dee says every school needs a Miss Mason and every school needs a Mr. D, too.



"You need both for the kids because you have that as kids. Most kids aren't like the perfect teacher. Most kids are like me or worse," he says.

"I remember a teacher said to me once, 'I don't know how you can do well in school and be such a pain in the ass.' And that kind of sums it up because if I saw an opportunity to make fun of something I would, but you could make fun of me too. It's the same way I am now—the same way as I taught."

He admits kids who were serious about academics wouldn't fare well in his class. He was more likely to tell jokes and stories than assign homework, but Dee had honourable reasons for taking up teaching.

"I thought, 'You know, I really like kids. I like coaching, I like seeing them get better at things,' and when I got into teaching I didn't realize that the whole academic side of that was something I didn't have. But I was very, very involved. I mean I would coach five teams. I would always help with prom, I would do all that stuff," he says.

"Was I a horrible teacher? Not at all. Was I a great teacher? Not at all. I'm just a good teacher. I think I was a good teacher."

Once, Dee added up his extracurricular hours and calculated he'd earned \$4 an hour over the school year. Meanwhile, another teacher at the school had earned the nickname Three-Oh-Five because he was always gone by 3:05 p.m.

"He'd probably be great. He'd probably be excellent marking their essays. He's probably amazing."

But looking back at his own schooldays, Dee says he doesn't remember the lessons—which probably goes without saying. When he and his former classmates get together they talk about teachers who did nice things or told stories.

"It's not like, 'Remember when he taught us order of operations? Oh my God, that was awesome.' So I guess I became that guy as well," he says.

And by extension, Mr. D is that guy, like him or not.

"Most of the stuff I hear is good, but I know there are teachers out there that won't like it," he says.

"That's the nature of teachers to me. They tend to be split on stuff anyway, and there are teachers that like to complain and there's teachers that get it's a joke and don't take it too seriously."



CALMING CLASSES WITH FIVE-MINUTE MEDITATION

BY MIREILLE THERIAULT

When Cari Satran asks for five minutes of silence in her classroom, her students have no problem with that. In fact, they look forward to it.

Mornings before class or after lunch, the middle-years teacher dims the lights and leads her students at École Leila North Community School in a brief meditation. Soft strains of mellow music fill the air punctuated by her voice gently reminding them to allow stray thoughts to move through the mind while focusing on their breathing.

Satran has taken the idea beyond the classroom. She led participants through an exercise at a SAGE day presentation last October. The practice is not a time of instruction on the “how to” of meditation or even the merits of what some could see as a spiritual practice in a secular setting. And at only five minutes, she doesn’t take time from classroom instruction beyond what she deemed would normally be needed for students to settle down.

“What is meditation and why meditate?” she asked. “There are many definitions that phrase the experience in different ways but for me it means awareness of what one is feeling, thinking and doing that can be extended to our daily lives to cultivate mindfulness. What’s important for me to share, and what motivates me is to show them how they can learn self-awareness and how they have power over their own thoughts.”

Most of her experience is with middle years students but she sees no reason not to introduce elementary level students to the practice with age-suitable times and expectations. For example, with her own students she uses music.

“I just think it’s a lot of pressure in Grades 7 and 8 to be in complete silence and while there’s a lot to be said for learning to be comfortable in silence, for my purposes the music is just a helpful tool to focus.”

Not all kids are able to find that centre of calm every time and she stresses that the meditation is not mandatory. Even though it’s only five minutes no student who excuses themselves from participating leaves the room either.

Satran didn’t begin the practice with students with the goal of improving academic performance, but a growing number of studies have linked meditation practices to better results in school.

“The potential benefits of meditation are quite remarkable, including decreased stress, increased feelings of calm, improved concentration, and a sense of well-being,” she said. “If you are here now, you already have an idea that it’s beneficial but if you’re one of the skeptics, then science is proving it with the MRI technology that’s come out in the last 10 years.”

In the past decade meditation, even if it hasn’t always been identified as such, has become more mainstream.

“What I’m finding is that a lot of people talk about visualization, deep breathing and relaxation, but really what’s the difference?” says Satran.

She has read extensively on the subject and taken a few seminars and classes but is mostly self-taught. In her opinion there is no right or wrong way to meditate.

“Teaching is a life-long practice. Meditation is a life-long practice. You have to start somewhere, so just start. To me the sincere intention to meditate is what’s important. I believe anyone can do it.”

“I know there are many teachers who, like me when I started 11 years ago, say ‘I’m going to meditate with my kids but I don’t want anyone to know.’ The first year I began this at H.C. Avery School, I did talk to the administration about what I would be doing. It’s a long time now, but I seem to remember the administrator suggested I call it something else, like relaxation. But I said, ‘well no, it’s meditation. That’s what it is.’ There was no more said about it. Later when I switched schools I didn’t really say one thing or another.”



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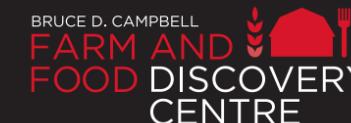
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Many student athletes filling cheeks with chaw

BY JUDY OWEN

It's a ritual that sounds far from appealing.

Take a pinch of tobacco, jam it into your mouth, chew it into a gooey blob and then spit a brown stream of juice into a cup, bottle or any handy container.

While the use of smokeless tobacco may seem nasty, it's a habit more and more young athletes are picking up and naively believing is less of an addiction or cancer-causing threat than cigarettes.

They would be wrong, dead wrong, says one expert who's trying to break a habit most often taken up by young male hockey, baseball and football players.

"Nicotine addiction in chewers is massive," says Dr. Dean Kriellaars, an associate professor with the University of Manitoba's physical therapy department.

Kriellaars held a session on smokeless tobacco in sport and schools at the National Physical and Health Education Canada conference in November at the University of Manitoba.

Citing several surveys he's done on young athletes, Kriellaars said the key to preventing the use of smokeless tobacco is to educate kids as young as 12 years old, make parents aware of the problem so they can watch for the signs and offer kids excuses they can give their peers when they're first offered smokeless tobacco.

"That's our best guess," he said of targetting 12 year olds. "I have no evidence yet that that works, but that's what we're left to right now because right now there's a complete absence of information out there.

"Parents aren't aware, children are not aware and then they're exposed to it and then

they have not even a comeback to be able to say no to it."

The comeback could be, 'I'm an athlete, can't afford it, my girlfriend doesn't like,' he said.

"Just saying no isn't going to work. There has to be one more step behind them because they need to have the excuse because there's time pressure and there's peer pressure at that moment."

When young users were asked what might have got them to stop, they told him, "Get me at 12 and make sure my parents will flip at me the first time I use," he said, adding most kids start between the ages of 12 and 16.

He'd like to see parents of young athletes given a card with information about smokeless tobacco when their kids are registering for sports, particularly baseball, hockey and football.

Some of the information could include figures on the percentage of athletes who have tried or use smokeless tobacco such as chewing tobacco or the popular Skoal or Copenhagen "snuff or dip."

In a survey with Manitoba Junior Hockey League play-

ers aged 16 to 20, Kriellaars found 42 per cent used smokeless tobacco on a daily basis, five per cent weekly, 37 per cent had tried it and 16 per cent had never tried it.

Those players were also asked why they chewed.

The No. 1 answer was because they were bored while travelling (44 per cent), 33 per cent liked the "rush" they got from it, 11 per cent said their buddies did it or it seemed "the thing to do" and none said it helped them on the ice.

Eighty per cent of the same team also said they had started while playing minor hockey.

Kriellaars does yearly talks with MJHL teams about various substances, including smokeless tobacco, and volunteers evening and weekends with many sports teams.

The primary settings for being introduced to chew were through an older brother or family member and a team sports setting, he said.

A survey of a Manitoba provincial baseball team found 55 per cent of players chewed, while it was the same percentage for a University of Manitoba football team.

It doesn't help that professional athletes are seen

using and that leaves the impression it's OK, Kriellaars said, adding few girls chew because most think it's "disgusting."

One Winnipeg high school hockey player said he started chewing about a year and a half ago when offered some by a friend on his team.

"I got a pretty big head rock, kind of like a nicotine drunk (for about 10 minutes)," said Tim, who didn't want his real name used.

"I felt really light headed. A lot of people puke the first time, but I didn't really swallow any so I didn't puke."

It also made him tired, but now he doesn't feel much.

"I just like it a lot and it's just part of my life now," he said, adding he's never smoked cigarettes.

"I kind of associate it with good times. When I'm fishing, I'll have a dip, or when I'm hanging out with my friends, I'll have a dip, or in the hockey room or football room, I'll have a dip."

Four of his Grade 12 football teammates dip and about five on his hockey team, but they do it before or after games.

"(Our coach) knows that kids do it, but if he sees it, he's like, 'It doesn't belong at the rink. If you're going to do that stuff, you do it at home on your own time. This is still a school activity,'" he said.

"The same goes for football. The football coaches don't really know."

Kriellaars said the chemicals and amount of nicotine in chew are high—four to 12 milligrams in a plug of smokeless tobacco compared to about one milligram per cigarette.

Some of the health risks include developing oral cancer, heart disease and/or gum and tooth disease, he said, adding 40 to 60 per cent of users will have leukoplakia, which are white patches on the gums, inside the cheeks and sometimes on the tongue that may lead to oral cancer.

Tim doesn't deny the health risks, but thinks they're low.

"Sure people do get the mouth cancer, but I don't think it's really that much that you get cancer from chew than people who smoke," he said. "In my opinion, it's safer."

Part of his reasoning is because he doesn't have first-hand evidence.

"Everyone says they know someone with like a hole in their mouth, but I've never yet to meet somebody with that or talk to somebody with that," he said.

"Maybe that would change my perspective. It probably would, but I just haven't."

It is an expensive habit as a tin costs about \$28 to \$30 in Canada. However, it's common for friends to go to the States and pick up rolls for about \$15 each, which equal five tins, he said. If he shares, he goes through about a tin a day.

As for his parents, his mom smokes and his dad is an ex-smoker. They've found a tin of his tobacco and thrown it out.

"A bunch of people told me like it's gross, don't try it and all that stuff, and I still wanted to try it," he said. "I knew it was bad for me, but, I don't know, teenagers do a lot of stupid stuff."

He has no idea when or if he'll quit.

"It kind of depends where my life goes," he said. "If I go play football somewhere I'll probably still do it, but I don't know."

"If I don't play sports anymore, I don't think I'll do it. I don't think I could do it and not be an athlete."

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PORTFOLIO

He looked like a small Walter White

A drug awareness demonstration for Grade 5 students, featuring a simulated drug raid, went somewhat awry in Indiana when a drug dog bit an 11-year-old student.

A small amount of a drug was placed on the student to show how dogs can find substances. The dog found them and chomped on the student.

Another victory in the war on drugs.



Cloudy, with little chance of brain

John Coleman is the founder of the Weather Channel. You would think, then, that he know about the weather. You would be wrong.

He says ice caps are not melting, sea levels are not rising and polar bears are not endangered. They are not endangered, he says, because "Eskimos have now become more civilized."



Butt master, health expert

Suzanne Somers, former actress on the old sitcom *Three's Company* and demonstrator of the famous ThighMaster and ButtMaster, has been telling people in the U.S. all about the Canadian health system.

Writing in a *Wall Street Journal* feature hilariously entitled "The Experts" says "I've had an opportunity to watch the Canadian version of affordable health care in action with all its limitations with my Canadian husband's family."

She starts off citing an old cover of *Maclean's* magazine "showing a picture of a horse on an examining table with the headline, Your Horse Can Get Better Health Care Than You." She then claims her sister-in-law had to wait three months to get a pill to correct a simple problem. Then says her 75-year-old friend was denied treatment here "because she was too old." She then died.

As well, "all of my husband's cousins are doctors. Several have moved to the U.S. because after their years of intensive schooling, they want to reap financial rewards."

After some controversy, the *Wall Street Journal* made a few corrections, including this:

"The cover of a *Maclean's* magazine issue in 2008 showed a picture of a dog on an examining table with the headline "Your Dog Can Get Better Health Care Than You." An earlier version of this post incorrectly said the photo showed and headline referred to a horse."

Quite the "expert".



HORSE CARE? WELL, SCHOOLS SHOULD TEACH THAT—AND THAT, AND THAT, AND...

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

It appears teachers really don't have enough to do.

At least every few months (although it seems like every day) some group comes up with an idea, a recommendation, a thought that: "(Fill in the blank) should be taught in school."

The latest that we know of is the Conference Board of Canada recommending in a report that food and nutrition education should be part of every curriculum at least until Grade 6.

It says there are "gaps and deficits in Canadians' knowledge and skills related to food." It says we need to improve "food literacy" through the schools. Just add rutabagas to the three Rs. Or, by now, it's probably closer to the 1,300 Rs.

And growing.

Recently, an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* by actress Roma Downey and *Survivor* producer Mark Burnett advocated the mandatory teaching of the Bible in schools.

In Britain, an education official said children should be taught in school how to "lose graciously."

Also in Britain, where apparently teachers are running out of topics, the mayor of London is promoting an idea that the teaching of Mandarin should be standard in all schools.

And, the calls by experts and folks with the same depth of thought as a rutabaga go on and on for what schools should be teaching:

- Creationism
- Creative writing
- Money management
- Filmmaking
- Chess
- Social skills
- Social media
- Practical mechanics
- Latin
- Sales
- Poetry
- Car maintenance
- How to sew on a button



- Boxing
- Emotional intelligence (huh?)
- Morals

There are many more, but suffice to say that if the complete list were somehow incorporated into all schools parents would be left with the task of teaching their children how to turn on the TV.

In fact none of the studies seem to consider that maybe parents and not schools should be teaching children how to sew on a button or that carrots are healthier than Coke. Amazing that researchers have so little faith in parents, since many of them probably are parents. Do they wish now that their teachers had taken the time to teach them how to box?

As well, the studies and research and the general wailing about what kids are taught and should be taught never includes anything about what should be dropped to make way for an examination of social media or backyard oil changes.

At the moment the idea of dropping handwriting (cursive writing, as it known to the more genteel) has generated a shock

wave of debate over how worthwhile it still is.

No, few things are ever dropped and there is, of course, the constant clamour that the basics should fill more and more of a student and teacher's time at school.

Again, it's not that teachers don't have the time. The most recent MTS workload survey found that the average teacher is only putting in 50 hours a week on school-related activities.

That leaves them with more than 100 other hours in the week to concentrate on teaching social skills and Latin (because there is a big call for that these days) and maybe a class on how to get by with just two hours of sleep a night.

Of course we shouldn't immediately reject all new suggestions for what should be taught in schools. Times change. New issues emerge. Perhaps at one time there was How to Care For Your Horse and Buggy 101.

As more and more courses were added to teachers' workloads, an editorial in the *Brandon Sun* heralded the development.

"As time goes on the demands made upon schools grow more and more exacting. It is a far cry back to the old days when readin', 'ritin and 'rithmetic constituted the total intellectual bill of fare.

"Youth must be served. We are beginning to realize that there is no more important task confronting the community than the efficient preparation of our boys and girls for the duties of life. To this end the three R's have been expanded into a broader curriculum. And the broader curriculum recognizes the necessity for educating not only the head, but also the hand and heart."

Date of publication: March 29, 1915

In fact, the website *Cracked* has made some valuable suggestions for modern education and what needs to be taught in schools:

- Sex Ed (for girls): How to Spot a Douchebag
- Political Science: Why Talk Radio is a Terrible Source of Information
- Social Studies: Life is Hard and Then You Die, Get Over It
- Phys Ed.: Practical Self-Defense (or, how to get away)



NEW MANITOBA TEACHER APP

The Manitoba Teachers' Society has created an app for tablet devices that allows members to download issues of *The Manitoba Teacher* newsmagazine for free.

Development of the app was approved at the last MTS Annual General Meeting as part of a series of recommendations from an ad-hoc committee that examined all aspects of the magazine from the format to content.

In an effort to move away from printing paper copies for all members, it was decided a starting point would be creation of an app to allow easy access to the magazine on tablet devices such as the iPad. The app is available for the iPad (in the Apple app store) and Android devices (in the Google Play store).

It was decided to develop the app after learning from the annual MTS members' survey that a third of the membership (as of a year ago) was now using tablet devices.

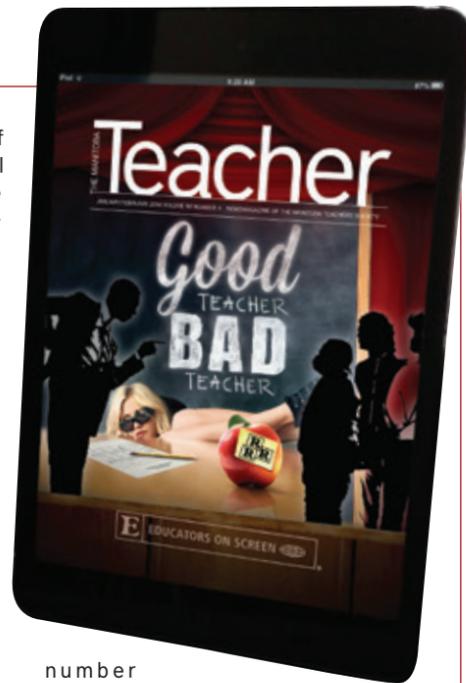
The committee recommended, and its report was approved at the AGM, that over the next two years the numbers of printed copies be reduced as online and digital readership grows.

The app brings to three the number of ways the magazine can be viewed. As well as being in print, a PDF of the magazine is available on the MTS website. That version, however, has been difficult to read for members and is limited in the content we can carry.

As we get more comfortable in designing the app version, it will allow for added features such as links, video and slide-shows to appear with articles.

Members can download the app by:

1. Making sure you have signed into the members' area of the MTS website. Go to the MyProfile button at the bottom left of the home page. The password you create here will be the one you use to download your subscription to the magazine.
2. Go to the Apple or Google Play store, search for *Manitoba Teacher* magazine and download the app.
3. To access copies of *The Manitoba Teacher*, click the sign-in button at the top (the subscribe button is for people who wish to purchase a subscription). On the first line enter your membership



- number found on your membership card. On the second line enter your MTS password (the one used to access the members' area of the website).
4. That's it. Future editions of the magazine will appear automatically in your digital newsstand for download.



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Individual students and groups will be honoured at the awards ceremony on Wednesday, May 21, 2014 at The Fairmont Hotel.



Young
Humanitarian
Awards



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