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Teacher

JUNE 2016 VOLUME 94 NUMBER 7 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

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P.4 *From the President*

P.5 *Inside MTS*

P.16 ***Recap on election promises***
MTS keeps track of the promises made around education during the official campaign period

P.10 ***First Nations star mythology***
Wilfred Buck puts a First Nations perspective into sciences



P.7 ***19th annual MTS Young Humanitarian Awards***
Manitoba's greatest young activists honoured



P.12 ***Gowns and suits for grads***
Volunteer run programs collect and distribute gently-used grad wear





FROM THE PRESIDENT

NORM GOULD

In my address to the opening of our Annual General Meeting May 26, I thought the message was pretty clear.

The main point was that we have had relative peace in education for the past decade and more and now, with the election of a new government, we don't know what the future holds. Will our cordial relationship with government continue? Will we face the "austerity" experienced in other provinces? Or will we just have a regular pull-and-push relationship where you win some and you lose some, and everybody keeps their heads?

Since we don't know, I emphasized that members should become engaged and prepare for whatever happens, good or bad.

Not everyone quite got the drift. The Winnipeg Free Press described the speech as "demonizing" the education minister and the premier. It also said I predicted an "economic doomsday."

Suffice to say neither of those are true. Nobody, (well, except maybe the Free Press) was trying to pick a fight with anybody. And if it ever came to that, we certainly won't need help. A full transcript of the speech is on the MTS website.

The idea of doomsday perhaps came from the fact I recounted the dark days of the 1990s when the last Progressive Conservative government enacted some anti-union measures and cutbacks that had far-reaching effects on the public service, including teachers.

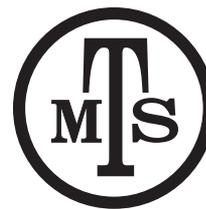
It is not a prediction that this will happen again. It is a reminder that the relative calm we have experienced since the turn of the Century may not continue. A change of government -- any government, any parties -- brings with it uncertainty and a need to be prepared.

In the case of teachers, such a reminder could also be looked on as a history lesson. Almost three-quarters of the teachers in classrooms today were hired after the struggles of the 1990s. Most of our members have only experienced education funding increased at or above the rate of provincial economic growth. We have won some major benefits through negotiation and discussion, rather than confrontation and protest. Not everything, but enough to keep the waters tranquil.

With that, our organization has become somewhat complacent. We've become accustomed to smooth roads and soft landings. We've lost sight of the reality that nothing is guaranteed. Our working lives could change quickly and dramatically. A few grenades could be tossed into those placid waters. Not to say they will, just to say they could.

And that's why we have to make sure we are prepared for changes. Members must become more engaged in what we are doing and what we need to do to prepare for the future when we see uncertainty give way to clarity.

We want to work well with the new government. But we also have to be ready and united if that concept collapses. As our guest speaker at the AGM, Rob Weil of the American Federation of Teachers, said: "It's not panicking, it's smart."



The Manitoba Teachers' Society

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Published seven times a year (September–June) by The Manitoba Teachers' Society. Articles and views published herein do not necessarily represent the policies nor the views of the Society.

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Publications Mail Agreement

40063378 ISSN 002-228X

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

Information Management
The Manitoba Teachers' Society
191 Harcourt Street
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3H2
email: mts-im@mbteach.org



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INSIDE MTS

TRIUMPHS AND TRAGEDIES IMPACT US ALL

BOBBI TAILLEFER, GENERAL SECRETARY

One of the best things about working for members at The Manitoba Teachers' Society is that, every single day, I get to see the power of our collective, the talent of our members and the fact that, despite being 15,000 strong, we are, in many ways, a small family. So when our members are recognized we are proud, when our members suffer losses we are saddened and when our members need our help we will be there.

Recently, Seven Oaks Teachers' Association member Bernadette Smith was recognized with the Order of Manitoba. The MTS family was very proud to see Bernadette's relentless work in demanding justice for Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women recognized. For years, Bernadette has pursued this goal despite the toll it has taken on her and her family. Bernadette has always shown great generosity by frequently sharing her painful and personal journey with MTS members. She, like many others, represents the best in us all.

This spring's provincial election also provided MTS members with the

opportunity to feel the pride of accomplishment. Many of our members, past and present, were elected to the Legislature – in fact, it is a testament to teacher leadership and capabilities, that Manitobans can say their Premier is a teacher and a former member of The Manitoba Teachers' Society. It is also interesting to note that this happened on the heels of a former teacher being elected Prime Minister of Canada. These examples, among others, clearly demonstrate the transferability of teacher skills and how the electorate values our inspired leadership.

Sadness recently came to the MTS family with loss of two of our members. Their passing was both very sad and very public. One situation that was reported in the press was about a young teacher who did everything she could to remain in the classroom to work with her charges until the very end. After her passing, her husband was interviewed by the Winnipeg Free Press where he shared how much she loved being a teacher and how much working with her young students gave her pleasure. That was why, even though she

knew her time was short, she chose to remain in the classroom with her students. The type of dedication, shown by teachers on a daily basis, was brought to a new level by this young professional and we, as a profession cannot help but feel pride for her selflessness.

The second loss was also very public as a teacher passed away during an extra-curricular school trip. The early details were heart wrenching. What should have been a unique opportunity for the teacher to interact with her students outside the classroom setting ended unexpectedly and cast a cloak of sadness on all concerned. In both of these instances we can feel not only loss but also great pride in our colleagues and their dedication to their students and to the profession.

Through all of these highs and lows there is one constant – members care. Members care about their students, members care about education, members care about the profession and through it all the Society staff and political volunteers are honoured and proud to provide support. It's what a family does – it's what we do.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society is seeking to fill two casual term positions with individuals who have a strong customer service mindset, are comfortable navigating registration and database programs and who hold a Manitoba Teaching Certificate. This term commences on August 23rd, 2016 and ends October 21st, 2016.

Position Title: SAGE On-Line Registration Assistant

Closing Date for Applications: Thursday, June 30th, 2016

Salary: \$20.00 per hour

Job Summary:

Under the guidance of the Professional and French Language Services staff, the successful candidates will deal with questions regarding the on-line registration process for SAGE conferences held on Manitoba Teachers' Society Professional Development Day. As the primary point of contact for registrants, the ability to solve registration-related problems and provide support via telephone and electronic means is essential. This service is being provided both prior to and on the October 21st, 2016 MTS PD Day.

The successful candidates will work three alternating shifts per week from 1:00 p.m. – 9:00 pm on weekdays and 10:00 am – 5:00 pm on Saturdays.

Consideration is given to the appointment of people in such a manner as to reflect the diversity of Manitoba's population. We encourage all qualified individuals to apply. We thank all applicants for their interest, however, only those candidates selected for an interview will be contacted.

Essential Qualifications:

- Experience in customer service
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- Knowledge of MTS and Special Area Groups of Educators
- Ability to navigate on-line registration and database programs
- Manitoba Teaching Certificate
- Ability to converse in French will be considered an asset

The successful candidates will be required to attend paid training sessions scheduled in August prior to commencement of the position.

Resumes can be emailed to the attention of Debbie Guillas, Human Resources Administrator at dguillas@mbteach.org.

Women's commission gets approval

MTS will be creating a commission to encourage and increase the number of women in leadership positions in public education.

Delegates to the Society's Annual General Meeting adopted recommendations of a report calling on the formation of the Women in Education Leadership Commission.

"We are all well aware that over 70 per cent of the membership of The Manitoba Teachers' Society is female," said President Norm Gould. "However, this is not represented in education leadership throughout the province.

"Women are simply not in leadership positions at the same proportion in relation to their membership numbers as school leaders, union leaders and community leaders."

And the number of women in MTS continues to grow.

While 68 per cent of teachers between the ages of 50 and 60 are women, 85 per cent of teachers 25 years of age and under are women. At the elementary school level, up to 90 per cent of teachers are women.

The commission will be an arm's-length body separate from the provincial executive. Its mandate will be to "seek input from women educators throughout the province ... and develop recommendations to enhance the participation of women in all aspects and all levels of educational leadership."

The three-member commission is to make recommendations to the 2018 Annual General Meeting.

No pension rate increase on horizon

No immediate contribution rate increases or adjustments to benefits are needed for the teachers' pension plan.

That was the message executives with the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund told delegates at the MTS AGM.

Jeff Norton, chief executive of TRAF, said rates could stay unchanged unless teachers wanted a buffer to protect the plan against unanticipated events such as a prolonged drop in investment returns.

However, he said that situation cannot continue forever.

"Future member contribution rate increases should be contemplated," he said. "Ideally, the province and MTS would agree in advance on the maximum level that would be acceptable, if required."

Long-term projections indicate changes will be needed to ensure that the plan is funded at around 100 per cent.

"If an adequate level of funding is not achieved and maintained through investment returns and/or membership contribution rate increases, the province and MTS should consider how benefit levels could be adjusted in the future to achieve an adequate level of funding."

Brenda Venuto, senior vice-president of member services, said one of the challenges facing the pension plan is that the number of retirees continues to grow at a rate greater than the number of active teachers.

Within the next two or three years, the number of retired teachers collecting pensions will exceed the number of active teachers paying into the plan.

Currently there are 14,187 retired teachers and 15,903 active teachers. There are 18 retirees that are 100 years of age or older. The oldest is 105 and she has been receiving a pension for 40 years.

Indigenous issues resolutions passed

Delegates voted overwhelmingly to encourage local teachers' associations to have a representative responsible for Indigenous education issues.

Bob Kriski, a member of the provincial executive and chair of the Aboriginal Voice and Action Standing Committee, said it would help the work of that committee and MTS in general in promoting and addressing Indigenous issues.

"Whether these are the issues facing Indigenous members of The Society, Indigenous children in our schools or the professional responsibilities of all members with respect to these issues."

Kriski said the position in local associations will provide grassroots information to the organization.

Another vote involving Indigenous issues passed unanimously. It highlighted six recommendations of the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission that should be immediately enacted.

Those include creation of an Aboriginal Languages Act, elimination of the discrepancy in education funding for Aboriginal children, training of public servants in Aboriginal history and an emphasis on Aboriginal education issues.



AGM HIGHLIGHTS

- MTS members will see an increase of \$20 in their annual fee next year.
- Delegates to the Annual General Meeting adopted a budget that increased the fee to \$976 from \$956, or 2.09 per cent.

PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE

The provincial executive will add only one new member, following voting at the MTS Annual General Meeting. Sandy Turcotte was the only new person elected, replacing Bob Kriski who is retiring. Three incumbents were re-elected.

The executive for 2016-2017 is:

President, Norm Gould

Vice-president, James Bedford

Members at large:

Ray Desautels

Frank Reeves

Mary Chalmers

Suzanne Jolicoeur

Beatrice Walker

Jonathan Waite

Kristin Insull

Ashleigh Deeley

Richard Alarie

Jeff Cieszecki

Young humanitarians honoured

Some of Manitoba's greatest young activists were honoured for their kindness, social conscience, and selflessness at the 19th annual MTS Young Humanitarian Awards held on May 25th. Opening up for the MTS Annual General Meeting, the awards were held at the Fairmont Winnipeg and hosted public school students from four school divisions in Winnipeg and Brandon, as well as their teachers, family and friends. This year's YHA winners include: Sage Karsin, a Grade 2 student from Linden Meadows School in Winnipeg, Tracie Leost from Garden City Collegiate, Nicole Ternowesky from Vincent Massey High in Brandon, as well as the Star Blanket Club from Gordon Bell High School.

YHA was hosted by radio personality Ace Burpee and featured performances from vocalist group Prodigy, singers Ezri Smith and Mitch Rees, and the dance troupe Exclusive Dancers from St. John's High School.



Members must be prepared

In the face of the unknown, MTS members should be prepared and engaged in the union.

Those were the main messages delivered at the Society's 97th Annual General Meeting.

President Norm Gould told the more than 300 delegates to stand united and to be prepared to work together for the union and the profession.

Guest speaker, Rob Weil, director of field programs for the American Federation of Teachers, told delegates they should work to engage members and the general community even if relations with the Progressive Conservative government are cordial.

For his part, Education Minister Ian Wishart told delegates it is the government's intention to work with teachers and MTS.

"I am interested in opening a dialogue with our education stakeholders to inform myself of their thoughts on the current state of secondary and post-secondary education in Manitoba," he told delegates to the MTS Annual General

Meeting. "The insights of those in classrooms and of their organization, are of value to me as we move forward together."

Gould said MTS is willing to work with the government, but as yet much is unknown.

"The premier and his finance minister have established that Manitoba's fiscal state is worse than expected, so we should all be prepared to tighten our belts.

"We don't yet know what that means for the future of public education, but we would be naïve to expect the status quo, given the government's priority of balancing the budget – austerity."

The last time the public service, including the education department, faced deep cuts was in the late '90s when the last Conservative government was in power.

Gould ran through some of the history of that period and listed how austerity measures in other provinces have adversely affected education.

He said members, most of whom began their careers during the last decade, have

Continued on page 8...



to be prepared if the same thing happens in Manitoba.

“As I stand before you ... I feel like there is a degree of complacency – a sense of entitlement – that has crept into this organization. This is a dangerous sentiment and a pervasive one that poses a threat to the Society and to public education in the province.”

The union needs to shake off the rust accumulated through the placid years, to get prepared and get members engaged before possibilities become realities, he said.

“Now is the time to seize our opportunity as an organization, to recognize that we are stronger together and learn from those lessons from our past and from our friends and colleagues across the country.”

The AFT’s Weil recounted some of the attacks teachers and their unions have faced recently in the United States, but emphasized it is a different atmosphere in America.

“We work in an environment that is combative,” he said. “We have to understand we work in a different environment. It’s a different world in the U.S.”

There are organizations and state governments whose aim is to make it difficult for unions to even exist. They have spent millions of dollars attacking unions and introducing legislation to strip them of their rights.

While Manitoba educators may not face the extremism witnessed in the U.S., there are people here who would like to see the same types of policies adopted in Manitoba, he said, citing a newspaper column calling on the new government to clamp down on unions.

“There will be a slice of the community who want a more American approach to things. You’re hoping. You want to see the successes of the past continue, but you have to be prepared,” he said. “It’s not panicking, it’s smart.”

Even if MTS has an amicable relationship with the government, the organization and its members need to be prepared.

“Be prepared to stop things, but be prepared to work with them, too. There will be wins and losses.”

While Wishart gave no details as to how the new government will approach education, he acknowledged MTS has been a valuable voice and hopes the collaboration continues.

“Teachers are an integral part of our communities and make a lasting impact in the lives of their students and our society as a whole.”

A transcript of Norm Gould’s speech and further AGM coverage is available on the MTS website, www.mbteach.org

Viola Desmond's Canada
A History of Blacks and Racial Segregation in the Promised Land
Graham Reynolds with Wanda Robson

In 1946, Viola Desmond was wrongfully arrested for sitting in a whites-only section of a movie theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. In 2010, the Nova Scotia Government recognized this gross miscarriage of justice and posthumously granted her a free pardon.

Most Canadians are aware of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat on a racially segregated bus in Alabama, but Viola Desmond's act of resistance occurred nine years earlier. However, many Canadians are still unaware of Desmond's story or that racial segregation existed throughout many parts of Canada during most of the twentieth century. *Viola Desmond's Canada* is a groundbreaking book that provides a concise overview of the narrative of the Black experience in Canada.

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— Winnipeg Free Press

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I ♥ #MTSPDDAY NEWS

It's going to be easier than ever to sign up and register for MTS PD Day sessions, thanks to a new program launched last year by MTS that aims to provide a no-cost online registration service to SAGE groups through the MTS UnionWare system.

Four Special Area Groups of Educators (SAGE) piloted the project last year to test out the system and provide feedback to MTS.

"We used the groups' feedback to add more customization to the program," says MTS Staff Officer Lia Baksina. "The feedback was positive and provided critical information on how we can adjust and customize the program to make it easier for the groups to manage their registrations, transfer of funds and cancellations if necessary."

The SAGE groups also reported that the membership lists generated by using the online registration process were very helpful post MTS PD Day.

The four groups will be returning this year joined by 9 others for a two day training session in June. In total there will be 13 SAGE groups participating in online registration through MTS this year.

"We wanted to roll out the system incrementally," says Baksina. "Our hope is that every group is involved in the future and the SAGE executives can pass on their training to new executive members."

The program was launched because SAGE groups said their members wished for the option to register for MTS PD DAY online and receive their information electronically.

"What we want SAGEs to do is use our system so we can better support them with the administration part, which frees up the groups to devote more time to planning."

Another aspect of the MTS PD Day tried out last year, sharing on social media, is coming back.

Members sent out photos of participants with hashtag boards -- I ♥ #MTSPDDAY.

The hashtag boards were introduced for the first time at last year's MTS PD DAY and are available in fun colours in both English and French. The idea for the boards came out of last year's SAGE Ad-Hoc Review Committee, and MTS Public Relations Facilitator Ray Job says they ended up being a real hit.

"What the hashtag boards did for us was heighten the branding of MTS during PD Day and we think it generated additional interest (among teachers) in using digital media and sending out pictures of themselves. People really liked it, and it added a lot of fun to SAGE sessions. It created buzz among the participants."

The hashtag boards were also used by MTS executive members who attended the conference.

"It was kind of cool because it let teachers make connections with each other and with their executive," says Job. The hashtag really took off and was trending on Twitter that day, second only to Adele's new single.

This year the hashtag boards will be doled out to all the SAGE groups through the SAGE Council meeting in the fall, as well as to local Teacher Associations Presidents and Executive members. The boards will be circulating on MTS PD Day so keep an eye out for them and join in the selfie fun.

"All teachers have to do is hold up the hashtag board and take a selfie. Pose with friends or colleagues if you like, and it often helps people smile if they have their arms around each other. Just try it!"





Reviving First Nations STORIES IN

When we look up to the night sky, most of us can recognize constellations like Cassiopeia, Orion and the Big Dipper, but the Greeks and Romans were not the only people who saw pictures and stories in the stars.

“They’re just the lucky ones that got put into school curriculums,” says Wilfred Buck (who prefers to go by Wilfred), who’s been a Science Facilitator at the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre in Winnipeg for the last 10 years.

Wilfred’s mandate has been researching First Nations star mythology in an effort to put a First Nations perspective into sciences at Manitoba’s 55 band-operated schools. While he did not have an academic background in astronomy, Wilfred chose to focus on that subject in the science curriculum because he is “fascinated by the stars.”

“Being of First Nations ancestry I spend a lot of time in the bush, away from urban centers, and one of the things we do is look up at the sky at night. And having attended school in northern Manitoba, I only ever heard about the Roman and Greek mythology of the stars,” says Wilfred.

“I started researching First Nations astronomy because it’s important for First Nations students that the ancestral worldviews related to science are reflected in their education in as prevalent manner as those associated with Greek and Roman mythology.”

According to Wilfred, “We are star people. One of the basic genesis mythologies is that we come from the stars. In my language, which is Cree, we call those ones up there Atchakosuk - the spirit light from above.”

When Wilfred began his research he spoke to elders who told him that every culture in the northern hemisphere went outside at night and saw the same star patterns, and that all the cultures in the northern hemisphere have their own connections to the sky. Every culture had their own teachings, had their own mythologies, had their own constellations and their own social norms and stories tied in with the stars, he says.

And it wasn’t long before he started stumbling across those stories, told to him by elders and people in the communities he visited.

One such story he came across was about the constellation popularly known as the Big Dipper or Ochekatchakosuk - the Fisher stars. The story speaks of how at some point in the distant past, there was no summer in this part of the world. It goes on to say that certain animals were selected to bring summer to the northern hemisphere. The animal that succeeded in this task (with help from other animals) was Ochek - the Fisher. To honour the success of this great task, the Creator placed the Fisher in the sky to remind us of what was then, what is now, as well as the possibility of what could be again if we do not respect what is loaned to us.

“The elders say that the 7 teachings they always talk about are all up in the sky, there’s a lot of symbology there,” says Wilfred, who includes Ininewuk, Anishinaabe, Lakota and Inuit mythology, as well as Roman and Greek, in his presentations. “What I present is only but a glimpse of traditional knowledge that is known and held by indigenous people throughout the world.”

Wilfred presents his teachings to all grades from K-12 and opens up his demonstrations to all residents of the communities he visits.



First Nations' THE STARS

PHOTOS & STORY BY MATEA TUHTAR

He also teaches hands-on science and presents at various educational conferences. He brings with him informational posters, telescopes and an inflatable portable planetarium with a projector that beams the different star patterns all around the observers. “We have laser pointers and we tell stories; stories that have legends attached to them, as well as songs.”

The students are often surprised to hear that there is such a long history of astronomy in First Nations, and Wilfred says he hears that often when he presents.

“They never considered that this is the case. They find it very interesting. It makes them feel proud.”

Wilfred tries to keep the stories relatable to students, such as the one that goes with the Seven Birds and The Big Bear constellations.

“It’s a story that reminds us of how bullies behave and why certain plants change colour in the autumn. They can identify with it and they go ‘Hey, that makes sense!’”

Wilfred has gotten great feedback from elders and teachers, who tell him that sometimes when they’re walking around at night in their communities their students

will grab them and point out the stars in the night sky. He says nobody else in Canada is doing this to the same extent and since last summer when he presented at a Canada-wide science camp there’s been a lot of

“It is our responsibility to pass these stories to our children. I hope to see a day where Anishinabe, Dene, Oji-Cree, Inuit, Lakota and Ininewuk and all other marginalized people hold their stories and relationships to the stars in plain view for their children and all the world to see.”

- Wilfred Buck

interest in his work from other First Nations communities across the country and as far away as Albuquerque, New Mexico.

To date Wilfred has gathered and researched 26 Ininew (Cree) constellation mythologies and has commissioned artists

Edwin Bighetty, an Ininew from Mathias Colomb First Nation to create a set of 12 constellations, and artist/Professor of Astronomy and Physics Annette S. Lee Lakota/Anishinabe and her partner William Wilson Anishinabe to create an Ininew Star Map that was unveiled on May 12th, 2016 at MFNERCs’ Annual Lighting the Fire Education Conference. The star map, along with a book on Cree Mythology will be available to teachers in the future. And there’s a lot more stories out there waiting to be told again.

“When the elders tell you their stories it’s up to you to pull out all the knowledge that is there, and that was meant for you to understand. And you piece it together. The elders have given me feedback and they say what we’re doing here is traditional - this used to be the education for our people.”

“It is our responsibility to pass these stories to our children. I hope to see a day where Anishinabe, Dene, Oji-Cree, Inuit, Lakota and Ininewuk and all other marginalized people hold their stories and relationships to the stars in plain view for their children and all the world to see.”



PHOTOS & STORY BY MATEA TUHTAR

Gals, guys, gowns & grads

For the GALS

The giggling and chatter can be heard before you even walk through the doors of 35 Albert Street. Inside, girls are excitedly picking out dresses, slipping into high heels, and stepping out in front of the mirror in their new gowns – some gingerly, others with a newfound confidence.

With candy pink walls, dressing rooms, floor length mirrors, and racks upon racks of fancy dresses, shoes, and accessories, the space resembles an intimate boutique – and that's exactly what Brooke Bouchard hopes it feels like for the hundreds of high school girls coming in to find their perfect graduation dress.

"It can be intimidating (looking for a grad dress)," says Bouchard. "We want to make this experience less overwhelming for the girls and we want everyone to walk out with their perfect dress."

Bouchard is the chair for Gowns for Grads – a volunteer run program that collects and distributes gently-used and new grad dresses to young women who need a dress to wear to their high school grad. The program began in 2009 at St. John's High School when one of the teachers there realized that some students weren't going to attend their grad celebration because they couldn't afford to buy formal clothes. Today the program is run through the Laura Milner White Committee and has expanded to serving 63 schools and 600 students this year in their newly donated space in the Exchange.

"It's come a long way," says Bouchard, noting that in 2011 they had no rural schools participate. "Today we have 13, some driving

as far as three hours away. Obviously we don't have the infrastructure to open it up to everyone in Manitoba, but if they contact us and they're within driving distance, then we're going to help."

The Gowns for Grads committee works year-round to promote awareness, fundraise and collect donated dresses from different locations around the city. Every dress that is donated is cleaned, and repaired if need be, so that by the time they go out on the racks they're in almost perfect condition.

"The program is open to any student and the only criteria is that there is a need. It doesn't matter to us what their circumstances are, just the fact that there is a need and that they are graduating from high school."

Students receive an almost new, or in

some cases brand new dress, a pair of shoes, accessories and jewelry, along with gift certificates from MC College beauty school and Perth's dry cleaning. There is no cost to students, though alterations are not covered. Often schools that have sewing programs help out.

"We tell girls that the dress is yours to keep, but if for whatever reason you don't feel like you'll wear it again, we'd love to have it back and you can recycle it so another girl can enjoy it," says Bouchard. One reason they stress that is that the program has a difficult time finding the same quality of plus size dresses.

"We offer everything from size 2 to 20+. Plus sizes 14 and up can be challenging to find, which is why we sometimes have to



buy them if we don't have enough. We do fundraising and look for dresses on Kijiji and we don't spend more than \$40 on them. But we want to offer a good selection of dresses to everyone, no matter what the size."

Bouchard says that otherwise donations have been positive. "People have been so generous and as when we go through donations we are constantly pleasantly surprised and so shocked at the quality we get."

And the students are thrilled as well.

"For the most part they're extremely happy. We have amazing volunteers working with the girls when they come in, bringing them things to try on, complimenting and making suggestions... And the girls just love how they look. It's a great experience for their self-esteem."

Schools and teachers interested in Gowns for Grads can follow them over social media or email them at gownsforggrads@gmail.com



For the GUYS

Girls are not the only ones who face a financial burden when it comes to dressing up for grad, and one Winnipeg teacher is making sure that boys also get their chance to look like a million bucks.

Dana Binder is a teacher at Gordon Bell Senior Off-Campus who started Suit Up Winnipeg – a program that collects gently-used suits and formal wear so that Grade 12 graduates have something to wear on Grad night, and beyond.

"I would take my girls to Gowns for Grads and every year I would think 'Why is there nothing for the guys?'" says Binder. After her last mat leave she decided to do something about it.

"I thought, okay that's it, we need to get something going. These guys spend more money on these suits and getting themselves

all dolled up than these girls do. We need something for them."

Binder put out a request on Facebook explaining that she's looking to collect gently-used suits, and the donations started pouring in. This is the third year of the program, and the first year it's available city wide.

"The first two years it was just me and a guidance counselor from Gordon Bell doing it together. Just through word of mouth, posting on Facebook and telling people about it everywhere I went."

One of the people that heard about the initiative was Virgin Radio's Ace Burpee who took it upon himself to help out. Now Virgin Radio does all the marketing for the program and Perth's has come on board for doing collections of donations. The response has been "phenomenal".

"The stuff that's been coming in has been amazing," says Binder. "I just picked up donated suits and you couldn't even see out my back window. My SUV was packed full."

One woman who wished to remain anonymous went to Moore's and bought brand new shirts, ties, and socks. Another parent at Gordon Bell is helping get cash donations for the program.

Binder has also received help from her own students, recruiting them to help with the event and get their volunteer hours.

"I can give the student some volunteering experience and retail experience. They learn how to measure, how to set things up, how to tag things. They get some of that exposure."

This year, 80 graduating boys are coming down from across the city to the event, held in the foyer of the old Imax theatre in Portage

Place mall. The guys can pick up a full suit, or separates like pants and a blazer. They also receive a shirt, tie, a pair of shoes if they find some that fit, and this year Binder is hoping to have socks for everyone.

"This is the first time a lot of these boys have put on suits," says Binder. "I can't tell you how many times I've had tears in my eyes just looking at these boys. Because I see them every day and they're always wearing the same thing. And so here they are coming in, trying on a suit and you can just see how uplifted they are. You can see the pride."

The students get to keep their suits forever and Binder hopes it takes them a lot further than just grad.

"My goal is: 'Look, here is your first suit. You can wear it to grad which is like starting a new chapter in your life. You can then take that suit and wear it to a job interview. You can wear it to a wedding or other formal event. Let's start the rest of your life off right.'"

Binder's favorite memory is of a student that came in last year.

"He was tattooed from the neck down. And he came in and put on a suit that fit him to a T. And he just walked up to me and hugged me, and said 'Thank you so much for doing this for me, and for all of us. Here is my number, I want to come back and help you next year.'"

Binder plans on continuing the program as long as she can, and is looking to build a committee of volunteers to help out. If you're interested in the program or helping out you can reach her at suitupwinnipeg@gmail.com

Tips for working with refugees

BY JENNIFER MCFEE

As educators begin to integrate an influx of Syrian refugees into the school system, a mental health initiative might add some insight to the process.

Clinic Psychology's Public Mental Health Initiative hinges on the notion that a little good information can go a long way.

Dr. Rehman Abdulrehman, director of Clinic Psychology and the Public Mental Health Initiative, reached out to international colleagues to share advice for working with refugees from Syria and surrounding Middle Eastern areas.

With contributions from psychologists and public health workers around the world, the team developed a set of tip sheets to promote a positive cross-cultural experience and to help with the transition process.

"The Public Mental Health Initiative is really about translation of knowledge. There's a huge body of literature on all aspects of psychology, cross-cultural or otherwise, that remains in academic journals that mostly other academics read," says Abdulrehman, who is also an assistant professor at the University of Manitoba.

"So how do you translate that knowledge to the public so everyone gets to benefit from it? We put a call out to clinicians who work in the Middle East. They submitted their information and their tips, which we collated and edited."

The 25-page document includes a section dedicated to education, drawing on best practices and culturally appropriate psychological knowledge.

"There tends to be a lack of trust sometimes, not just with refugee groups but with immigrant groups. There is this perception that we are different, and people tend to look for differences more than they do for similarities on both ends. I think that's a natural tendency. But this set of tip sheets tends to build that bridge for teachers so that they better understand the context," Abdulrehman says.

"It provides a context of understanding for what those families have gone through and also what their culture might dictate, as well as what might influence behaviours and performance at school. It's critically

important for teachers to have this information because they actually end up being the first-line responders."

Abdulrehman says his No. 1 tip for teachers is to expect lapses in education, particularly for children who have been living in refugee camps. As a result, they should avoid making assumptions about levels of intelligence.

Another important issue revolves around potential behavioural problems.

"You can expect that children who've undergone trauma are more likely to be aggressive," he says. "The ways in which we discipline children or sanction children is going to be important and we need to be mindful of the context."

Newcomers might also have a different concept of family involvement in education.

"There tends to be a lack of trust sometimes, not just with refugee groups but with immigrant groups. There is this perception that we are different, and people tend to look for differences more than they do for similarities on both ends. I think that's a natural tendency. But this set of tip sheets tends to build that bridge for teachers so that they better understand the context."

*- Dr. Rehman Abdulrehman,
Director of Clinic Psychology and
the Public Mental Health Initiative*

"It's critical for the family to be involved in education and they may have a lot of questions. But the way in which the family interacts in different cultural settings in the eastern world isn't going to be the same as it would be in the western world. Many parents may be more engaged and more particular about what their children are learning, and many teachers might not expect that," Abdulrehman says.

"In the West, there might not be as much of that involvement, so some teachers might



take that as offensive but, in fact, it actually is a cultural thing. It's important to know how to respond to that to make those people feel comfortable. That way, there's a bridge instead of feeling that their skills are being questioned because that's certainly not the case."

The tip sheet, entitled "Working with refugees from Syria and surrounding Middle East countries: Practical tips from cultural and psychological perspectives," is free to download.

For Abdulrehman, the tips are useful tools for anyone involved in the school system — including teachers, administrators, support staff and even other families.

"We want people to use this. The whole purpose of this is that it's a free resource that anybody can make use of," he says.

"The way to change public health information about mental health is to talk more about it and to have greater access to information. I would encourage people to share these tip sheets and to talk more about this instead of feeling like they're alone."

For more information on the Public Mental Health Initiative or to download the tip sheets, visit www.clinicpsychology.com/refugeetipsheets.

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON
MTS DEPARTMENT HEAD,
COMMUNICATIONS



Recap on election promises



With a new government in Manitoba, many teachers may still be wondering what the new administration has in store for public education.

The election campaign and its immediate aftermath has provided very few specific indications as to what plans Premier Brian Pallister may have involving education policy in the province. Fewer promises were made compared with the last election and most were general declarations of support for public education.

Certainly Pallister made clear during many forums he has an affinity for teachers and that a number of family members, including himself, have been teachers. He has promised to protect frontline workers, including all teachers, but also has said he respects the need for local school boards to make their own decisions.

So, questions remain.

Some fear we will see a return to the austerity times of the 1990s that saw cuts to many front-line services. There are also concerns the new government will adopt some of the so-called education and labour reforms of right-wing administrations in the United States.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society has kept track of the promises made around education and what the Conservatives have said before and during the official

campaign period.

As a reminder, the following quotes are from a recorded interview Pallister did with the MTS's head of communications.

On MTS

"It was as a teacher I was elected as our rep, and I owe MTS a lot because after teaching for several years I went to return to university and I was awarded a scholarship from my union that helped me tremendously to get through that next year at school." (Pallister also recounts how MTS intervened on his behalf to overturn an unfair job appraisal.)

On organized labour

"I was raised by a pretty staunch union mother and I have always felt organized labour has tremendous benefits to society, frankly. I mean, imagine a system without it. I don't think it would function. But the province has to bear in mind the interests of non-union employees and people who are sole proprietors of little businesses and whatnot, too. There are clearly diverse interests that have to be considered in any decisions.

So-called 'right-to-work' laws

"I don't think it has any application in our situation here in Manitoba. Overall we've had fairly healthy labour relationships in our province for a

number of years. It's never perfect obviously. There are obviously going to be points of disagreement, but we've been doing extensive consultation around the province, including with many teachers. There are many issues that are raised but we haven't had a lot of issues raised concerning labour or the need for radical restructuring of our labour situation in the province."

Standardized testing

"We need better testing. Teachers are telling me they would like to have more latitude to do more analysis, not less, more reporting, not less. But they want it to be worthwhile reporting, not necessarily reporting for show but reporting accurately to give parents and students accurate feedback.

"So we need to make sure we are taking measures with a made-in-Manitoba focus because to me we have some, while not totally unique, very interesting challenges in our education system that other provinces don't have. We should be focussing on those."

Education cutbacks

"I use the phrase front line service because I consider teachers to be front line public servants and to me the analysis we've seen vs. other jurisdictions is that

we are very, very fat at the high end of our civil service now. We have expanded a lot at the top ... whereas the front line has not been the focal point and the numbers seem to bear that out.”

“People working at the front line of the public service in health care, education and social services; that’s your front line and I believe there’s waste in all governments. We can find the waste, we can eliminate the waste and we can protect the front line services. That’s what most people care about, I believe, and that’s where we have to have our emphasis.”

Merit pay for teachers

“Well, it’s an interesting debate, but how do you develop a system like that? How do you make a system like that work? For me, again, it’s probably going to sound hokey, but my favourite memories of teaching, that was my merit pay. I don’t know who would evaluate it.”

Education cuts in the ‘90s

“Anyone who lived through that period knows they were probably paying 14 per cent a year interest on their mortgage, they remember that the federal government did the largest cutbacks in transfers in the history of programs and the provincial government was saddled with those things and had to deal with them. It was a challenging time for everybody. Recession at the same time. Factors there were very different than the factors we have now. There were more teachers working in Manitoba when I left provincial cabinet than when I went into provincial cabinet. That I know.”

Keeping public school funding at the current level

“The proof will be in the budgeting process as we go forward. The proof will lie in the actions. I have always believed ... don’t listen so much to what politicians say, but what they’ve done. I’ve always been an advocate for education. I’m not likely going to stop now, too old to change my mind. I let my record of actions speak to my commitment to education.”

Amalgamation of school divisions

“These are discussions we could have. If you are going to talk amalgamations, you do it in consultation with the people. It’s the people’s school division. I would have to do more research to give you an informed opinion.”

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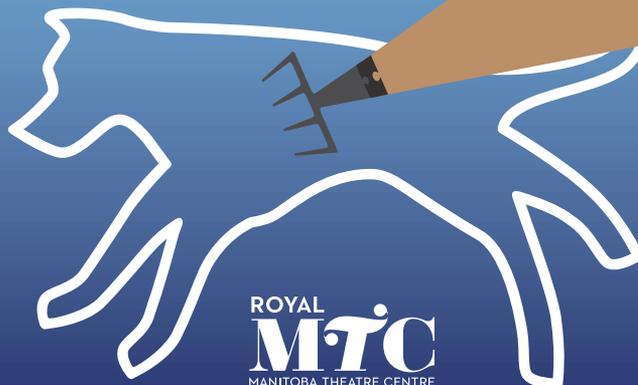
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Changing the face of classrooms

BY KENNETH MCCORKLE

The theatre filled with a cacophony of voices rising from the capacity crowd of delegates and ministers of education from across Canada as they entered Yellowknife's Northern Arts and Cultural Centre one last time to engage in the final gathering of the symposium before closing ceremonies. Soon, however, a hush fell over the audience as Elder Margaret Thom took her place at the podium. "Too often we have come to these gatherings, we have shared our hearts, and we have asked for change... and too often we have seen little. We as Elders and Aboriginal educators call upon you, the ministers of education, to make the changes we have set forth in this symposium. We give you one year, ONE YEAR, to make these changes and report back to us about what you have done."

Many in the audience moved uncomfortably in their chairs. The shifting sands of politics and educational leadership continuously morph into new configurations as the winds of political will and current pedagogical fads blow first from one direction and then another.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada's Aboriginal Educators' Symposium concluded last June with an address from Margaret Thom followed by a traditional drum ceremony. At the one-year anniversary of her address, Newfoundland, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have all held provincial elections with power changing hands in two of the four. Still, legislatures cannot ignore the collective voice of last year's symposium on proportional employment for teachers with Indigenous heritage.

Experts in the field of education have repeatedly confirmed that Indigenous students learn best in environments of targeted affirmation and in settings where they have readily-available role models with whom they can identify. Students must have the opportunity to imagine themselves in the shoes of those who serve as their role models throughout their formative years. This dynamic, however, all but vanishes in the experience of Indigenous learners when, year after year, non-Indigenous teachers greet them at the doors of their classrooms.

The numbers, although a concern in and



Manitoba's delegation to the CMEC conference with Jackson Lafferty (Minister of Education, Culture and Employment for the NWT)
Back Row: Kenneth McCorkle, Minister Lafferty, Elder Don Robertson, Jacqueline Bercier, Lance Guilbault
Front Row: Tamara Prince, Dr. Sherry Peden (UNC), Director Helen Robinson-Settee, Brittney Ferland, Ron Cook

The Indigenous population of Manitoba currently hovers near 17 per cent. Within the schools of Manitoba about 10 per cent of teachers self-identify as Indigenous. Due to the distribution of Indigenous teachers throughout the province, a significant percentage of Indigenous students never encounter even one educator of like heritage.

of themselves, do not convey the entire story. The Indigenous population of Manitoba currently hovers near 17 per cent. Within the schools of Manitoba about 10 per cent of teachers self-identify as Indigenous. On the surface this would appear moderately concerning, but when the lived experiences of a great proportion of Manitoba's Indigenous students comes into sharper focus, a startling truth emerges. Due to the distribution of Indigenous teachers throughout the province, a significant percentage of Indigenous students never encounter even one educator of like heritage.

As long ago as 2009, the Aboriginal

Teachers' Questionnaire Report noted:

"It is well recognized that ... hiring Aboriginal teachers can help to enrich learning for all students and yield positive results for Aboriginal students. Training and hiring more Aboriginal teachers has been identified as a key strategy to improve Aboriginal education outcomes in many reports on Aboriginal education in Canada. Increasing the representation of Aboriginal teachers in Manitoba schools is a key objective of the province's Aboriginal Education and Employment Action Plan, which supports the shared goal of improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners within Manitoba's educational system."

As a result of the symposium the Manitoba delegation recognized a number of factors that reduce the likelihood of Indigenous students becoming teachers. These include early alienation through racism, failure to imagine themselves as teachers in childhood dreams, lower academic achievement, perceived (cultural) irrelevance of the curriculum, lower high school graduation rates, community pressure not to attain educational goals, belief that success at the university level is unattainable and culture shock in the city during university studies.

In an August, 2015 meeting with then Minister of Education, James

Allum, Manitoba's delegation to the CMEC symposium brought several recommendations forward. Among the proposed courses of action endorsed by the delegation, five stand out as having paramount importance: the seamless inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum (i.e. not being presented as the anomaly or the other), the augmentation of targeted interventions for students who achieve poorly in early years, the availability of funding for all Manitoba school divisions to hire one male and one female Indigenous Elder, the installation of two recruiters to focus on guiding Indigenous students into faculties of education and the creation of a requirement that all Manitoba students complete an Indigenous Studies course as a component of their secondary education.

The last of these recommendations calls for some explanation. Currently, the Northwest Territories, alone, requires an Indigenous studies course for graduation. This proposal presents a challenge in that it would reduce the number of option courses that students might take during their time in high school. The delegation noted, however, that British Columbia has addressed this concern by creating specific ELA courses with a local, Indigenous focus at each grade level from nine through twelve. For Manitoba students who opt not to take a flagship course such as the soon to be released Grade 11 Indigenous Studies: The Consequences and Triumphs of Indigenous Philosophy or Grade 12 Current Topics in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies, taking the Indigenous Focus ELA courses could fulfil the requirement without reducing electives.

The foregoing proposals from Manitoba's CMEC delegation technically do not necessitate action on the part of the government, however, they do represent an important movement within the thought of educators across Canada. Moreover, Director Helen Robinson-Settee (Aboriginal Education Directorate) suggests that the work of the CMEC delegation has already had significant impact upon policy direction for pedagogy in Manitoba. Although not completed, Manitoba has answered Elder Margaret Thom's challenge with appreciable movement in the effort to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in the province.

Ken McCorkle served as a member of the Manitoba delegation to the CMEC conference and is widely recognized as an expert on Indigenous Education.

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PORTFOLIO

Hope springs eternal

The Premier League victory of the Leicester City Foxes in Britain should give hope to the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and Winnipeg Jets that anything can happen.

Leicester City was not just a long shot to win the title, it was a moon shot or a mars shot.

Before the season, oddsmakers in Britain put the team's chances at 5,000 to one. In other words, bet a buck, get 5,000 back.

Also at that time oddsmaker William Hill gave the same statistical chances to:

- Christmas being the warmest day of the year in Britain.
- Kim Kardashian becoming U.S. president in 2020.
- The Loch Ness monster found to exist.

A finely-tuned electoral system

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

It's no easy task to fully understand the American political system and its intricate arrangement of gears, pulleys, rollers and hoops that somehow spit out the Leader of the Free World every four years.

Fortunately, in this election year, Portfolio is willing to help. Pay close attention.

The current American election campaign is now in its 27th trimester with almost half a year to go. As networks like CNN often point out (and, in doing so, reinforces its position as a Cliché News Network) the race is not a sprint, but a marathon. That would be true, if marathons were 40,000 kilometres long and took four years to complete.

No, it's more like the Donner Party or the Franklin Expedition, but with better food.

And maps.

It all begins with what are called the "primaries" as opposed to the





YOGA'S CALMING EFFECT

A man who wanted to do yoga on a flight from Hawaii to Japan threatened to kill passengers and shoved his wife when told he had to sit in his seat.

The flight had to turn around after the man went to the back of the plane to meditate and do yoga and wouldn't return to his seat. He tried to headbutt and bite marines who were also on the plane and came to the aid of the flight attendant. He shoved his wife because he said she was siding with the crew.

THIS IS DEMONIZING

It appears the Winnipeg Free Press is in desperate need of a dictionary.

In its coverage of MTS President Norm Gould's speech to the MTS AGM, it said the Society "demonizes Education Minister Ian Wishart, Premier Brian Pallister, predicts economic doomsday near." You'd think the reporter got a look at the script of the latest Jerry Bruckheimer film rather than heard a speech that never even mentioned the education minister or the premier. Needless to say, nobody was demonized in the speech (freely available on the MTS website) and there were no revival-tent predictions of an oncoming doomsday. To top it off, they tweeted it out as breaking news.

They no doubt meant broken news.



"secondaries" which don't actually exist. The primary system, as easily unravelled as a 40-metre extension cord, is an elaborate method for each party to choose their presidential candidate.

Each state holds primaries, except those that hold something called caucuses, but both give meaning to the term Gordian Knot. In some states only party members can vote, in others anyone can vote and, in others, members of one party can vote in the other party's primary. Voting determines the number of delegates each candidate will get at parties' national conventions. Some states award delegates based on how many votes each candidate receives, some award almost all to the winning candidates, some are based on individual counties etc. etc.

Candidates go into state after state, visiting local diners and eating corn on the cob and showing the locals in high school gymnasiums that they are just like them, if "them" could raise \$2.4

million in an afternoon. But it's tough. The media follow their every pronouncement, analysing crucial policies and platforms. In the last go-round, John Kasich was dealt a harsh blow by eating pizza with a fork in New York. Ted Cruz's campaign suffered when, in the b'ball heartland of Indiana, he called a basketball hoop a basketball ring.

The primaries, then, cut down the field. The political doppelganger of Survivor. As they get fewer and fewer votes, candidates leave the island, unless you're Bernie Sanders, who was apparently math challenged.

In the end, the intricate checks and balances, debates and votes help parties come up with the best possible presidential candidate.

Donald Trump, come on down!

Once the primaries and the conventions are done, it is on to the main event, the actual presidential campaign where U.S. citizens get to vote for the candidate of their choice. Except that they don't.

Way, way back in the 1700s, the crafters of the U.S. constitution had some sort of hang-up about the people directly electing a president. So, a committee was formed. And it came up with a system where voters vote

for people called electors who would then vote for president; a system only a committee could think up.

It was also set up this way because southern slave states were opposed to direct elections because of their small voter populations. However, under the electoral system, the number of electors was determined by population and slaves were included (or, each slave was counted as three-fifths of a person) for purposes of the electoral allotment.

It is now called the Electoral College, giving it an air of scholarship and dignity to fumigate its tawdry beginnings.

Simply, each state is given a set number of electors based on the number of senators and representatives a state has. So, a candidate might well end up with the fewest votes nationwide, but still become president based on winning in elector-rich states.

George W. Bush, come on down!

The Electoral College, which never actually meets, votes in December, long after all the balloons have fallen and bags of confetti tossed on the winning candidate.

In January, the new president is sworn in and the whole process pretty much begins again.



QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?
I'D LOVE TO HELP.
REACH ME AT [RJOB@MBTEACH.ORG](mailto:rjob@mbteach.org)

REFRESH

BY RAMAN JOB, PUBLIC RELATIONS FACILITATOR

16 TIPS to keep your social fresh on break

Summer break. It's all about the pursuit of happiness and sanity. A chance to pack up the kids, pets and friends and hit the road, the beach, the festivals, or make like Anthony Bourdain and head for parts unknown.

But wait. You're honestly going to ignore those social media accounts you've been feeding all year long? You're actually dreaming of putting yourself on a two-month social media fast and ghosting your Facebook and IG friends?

We all know that bit of make-believe will evaporate as soon your phone picks up even the faintest wi-fi signal in the campground or at the airport. You'll be taking pics and

juggling pixels all summer long. So try something new now that you have some time to play.

Here are 16 tips to keep your social fresh this summer.

1. Download Periscope on your smartphone and livestream your adventures from Canada's Wonderland, Dauphin's Countryfest, Kenora's Harbourfest or the Gimli marina.
2. Fire up Facebook Live and stream your family dinner or BBQ to relatives and friends in any corner of the world. Download nothing. It's already part of your Facebook app.
3. Shoot some crazy poolside vids of your kids with a new waterproof case. The Catalyst case is good down to 5 meters.
4. Drool over, maybe even spring for, some sweet smartphone gifts and gear from Photojojo.com. Hint: Wide-angle lens, your "secret weapon against boring photos".
5. Take a family or couple portrait at the lake. Blow it up to IMAX size and mount it on foamcore for your cottage living room. London Drugs will do this for you, but so will a local sign store.
6. Caught in the city? Show your fellow staycationers where you've been. Create digital photo collages of multiple years' summer excursions for throwback Thursday (#TBT).
7. Order a green screen and dual light kit from Amazon.ca and pretend you've gone to Europe or Australia. You can find kits as low as \$150 on Amazon.ca and in mere days the magic will be in your hands.
8. Chase those crazy sunsets and post your best captures to Instagram. But don't forget to juice them up with your favourite photo editor or they'll look flat

and lifeless. Inject the emotion of the moment back into them with SnapSeed or Enlight.

9. Play with Snapchat and discover what a creative and addicting app it is. Watch Dottotech's "Snapchat for Old Farts" as a primer. Swap faces with your friends. Try a silly filter on your kids. If it sounds too edgy, remember that the University of Manitoba, PM Justin Trudeau, the Kingston Police Department and even The White House use Snapchat regularly.
10. Buy a cheap Kindle or Kobo so you can actually read your summer ebooks without smartphone glare or pesky notifications and apps that vie for your attention.
11. Luxuriate – yes luxuriate – in the time it takes to listen to a worthwhile podcast.
12. Gaze at the stars, then find out what you're looking at with an astronomy app.
13. Download Google Photos to backup and auto-organize your summer memories. It's free and unlimited.
14. Add text to your photos with two brilliant apps - Word Swag and Adobe Spark Post. The results will be stunning.
15. Early years teachers: Watch a few American teachers livestream their big "classroom reveals" on Periscope weeks before your holidays end. Smile, take another sip, and plan to rock yours.
16. Create anything: A family blog, a smartly edited video, some lame memes, the ultimate "What I did on my summer vacation" slide deck. After all, consumption is so welcome and relaxing. But nothing gives you a bigger buzz than creating something new under the sun.

Have an idea for a story or a social media question? Kick it to me at rjob@mbteach.org





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