

SPRING 2025 | VOLUME 103 NUMBER 3

MBTEACHER

NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

ECO- EDUCATION IN ACTION:

BEES, CHICKENS, AND
GARDENS POWER
LEARNING AT ÉCOLE
LEILA NORTH

FUN AND GAMES MEET
COMMUNITY BUILDING
AT TABLETOP CLUBS

INTERGROUP
DIALOGUE PAVES
THE WAY FOR
PEACEBUILDING



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COVER STORY ECO-EDUCATION IN ACTION

Students aren't the only busy bees at École Leila North! Dedicated to hands-on learning, the community school's urban agriculture program is a living lesson in sustainability, empathy and community connection thanks to teachers Pam Godfredsen and Ashley Taylor, along with trusty therapy animal and school mascot, Left-Eye Lisa.



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TABLETOP GAMING IN SCHOOLS

Fun and games are just part of the equation in Kay Wojnarski's classroom. The high school teacher says playing together enhances cognitive skills, critical thinking, vocabulary and creativity, with incredible social and emotional benefits as well. Strengthened relationships across grade levels, reduced stress, increased empathy, and community building are just a few of the 'big wins'.



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BUILDING CONNECTIONS THROUGH DIALOGUE

It can be stressful wading into a tough topic and harder still to maintain an environment of safety within the conversation. The pressure to resolve a situation quickly may even make things worse. Izzeddin Hawamda, a Palestinian educator in Manitoba, illustrates how Intergroup Dialogue offers a path towards improved relationships rooted in story.

DILIGENCE AND FAIRNESS

The road to proclamation for Bill 35 was long, winding and bumpy, with teachers sharing grave concerns about the legislation's vague language and intent. Inaugural Commissioner of Teacher Professional Conduct, Bobbi Taillefer, shares her perspective on the commission, the teacher registry, and a made in Manitoba solution that she says "got it right".

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Zhaoliang Sun

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Zhaoliang Sun is an interactive digital media (IDM) teacher in his sixth year at Kildonan-East Collegiate. He is currently involved in supervising and commissioning eSports events for the Manitoba Scholastic eSports Association (MSEA). Creating a safe, fun and engaging environment are core tenets of pedagogy that he implements both in his classroom and extracurricular work.



Kay Wojnarski

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Kay Wojnarski (she/they) is a high school technology teacher at Collège Jeanne-Sauvé who specializes in media, drafting and video game design, and can often be found running Pathfinder games at the CJS Tabletop Club. She and her wife Sarah run Sunny House Rescue, a foster home for neglected and abused cats.



Izzeddin Hawamda

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Izzeddin Hawamda serves as the anti-racist education professional learning initiative coordinator with Louis Riel, River East Transcona, and Winnipeg School Divisions. He completed his Ph.D. in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba. Founder of Sadaa, an organization that strives to create spaces for meaningful dialogue, he is also a fellow at Canadian Mennonite University.



Erin Thomas

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Erin Thomas is a teacher librarian at two vibrant elementary schools in Winnipeg. Her days are filled with the joy of books, the thrill of teaching, and the wonders of technology. When she's not inspiring young minds, she weaves magic as a fiber artist, crafting whimsical creatures from natural yarns. She shares a charming century-old home with her English husband and two mischievous calico cats.



Natasha Herring

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Natasha Herring has taught for 15 years across northern, rural and urban divisions and began her career teaching Industrial Arts. She is currently working in the Louis Riel School Division. With her Masters in both counselling and inclusive education, Natasha has provided supports from K-12. She will begin her PhD in education in fall, 2025.



FULL CIRCLE

Nathan Martindale

Back to the Future at
Ralph Brown School

After years of serving in this role, I find myself writing my final piece for The MB Teacher—and truthfully, it's hard to put into words everything I'm feeling. If there's one emotion that rises above all the rest, however, it's gratitude. Deep, lasting gratitude for being part of something bigger than myself—this Society, this profession, this community.

I've always been proud to call myself a teacher, and to be actively engaged in The Manitoba Teachers' Society has deepened that pride in ways I never expected. In every room I've entered—classrooms, staffrooms, board rooms—I've seen what it means when people stand up for each other. I've seen care in action, strength in numbers, and unwavering commitment: to our students, our schools, and each other.

So yes, I'm proud—of what we've built together, of the difficult conversations we've had, the negotiations we've undertaken and the progress we've made. I'm proud of the solidarity that runs through every MTS member I've had the privilege to work with, and of the laughter, the long hours, the breakthroughs, the setbacks, and the way we've always kept showing up.


This September, my journey comes full circle. I'll be working at Ralph Brown School in the Winnipeg School Division—the same school where I graduated from the Ukrainian Bilingual program. I'm excited to return to the classroom as an active MTS member stepping forward into a new chapter. I'm excited to be back in the rhythm of school life, to be surrounded by students and

colleagues, to feeling the day-to-day pulse of teaching, reminded daily of why we do what we do.

At the same time, I'm equally excited for what lies ahead for the Society. I look around and I see passion, energy, and new voices ready to take us forward. Leaders who are bold, thoughtful, and ready for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. I couldn't be more confident in the future of MTS, and I couldn't be more pleased to pass the baton to those ready to lead with heart and purpose.

Most of all, what I'll carry with me are the friendships—woven quietly into every step of this journey. Starting with friends I made almost 20 years ago at the Winnipeg Teachers' Association, to local presidents and fellow members of the Provincial Executive, to staff, to the voices around the Canadian Teachers' Federation table and kindred spirits in unions across Manitoba, Canada, and beyond. You've shared the weight, the laughter, the purpose. You've reminded me, time and again, that this work is human at its core. And for that, I'm endlessly grateful.

So, thank you—for your trust, your partnership, and your belief in what's possible when we work together. I leave this role filled with hope. Not because the work is finished—it never is—but because I know the people carrying it forward. And because I know I'll be there beside you, one of many, ready to do the work.

See you in the staffroom. 

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FROM THE
INTERIM
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR



EMPATHY: THE WORK OF THE HEART

Glen Anderson

Lessons in Classroom
Connection

If I had to identify an over-arching theme within this issue of the MB Teacher it would be empathy: where to find it, how to cultivate it, and why we so desperately need it.

IN THIS ISSUE

Our cover story **Eco-Education in Action** (pg. 14), beautifully illustrates how connecting with living things helps us understand that everything (and everyone) has a place in the global ecosystem. Then there's two reflections by Manitoba members, **Creating Community Through Gaming** (pg. 8) and **Tabletop Gaming in Schools** (pg. 11), about how the creation of a joyful school community through gaming builds confidence and compassion. The members 'gamely' share their experience, which artfully blends the imaginative and the academic. Turns out gaming improves math skills and chickens help with anatomy class. Added bonus: no computer screens involved!

We profile newly minted Commissioner of Teacher Professional Conduct, Bobbi Taillefer, (pg. 20) and get clear on how the commission's processes and policies are taking shape. Taillefer understands the importance of getting it right and looks forward to working with education stakeholders to do just that.

Council of School Leaders president Chris Hicks reflects on the underrated role that advocacy plays in the day to day lives of school leaders in **The Principal of the Thing** (pg. 28), while

recently retired MTS Staff Officer Lia Gervino looks back on her exceptional work with the Women and Leadership portfolio (pg. 22). She shares not only lessons learned but what we can take forward to enhance opportunities for women in education to fully inhabit their leadership potential.

And if you haven't heard about the launch of an MTS pilot project aimed at forming teams of members dedicated to creating tangible change around areas of key concern to teachers, take a look at MTS Vice President Cynthia Taylor's article **A Place for You in Your Union**, (pg. 26). We want your input! You'll find all the information you need to assess the opportunities on mbteach.org. Just click MTS Member Engagement Expression of Interest on the landing page.

Then there's an assortment of great book reviews and profiles of a couple of our Special Area Groups of Educators (SAGEs) to round out your reading experience.

Empathy is the work of the heart, and within the context of our busy lives, stressful roles and the challenges inherent in our communities, it can be hard to muster. Yet every day you find ways to show students and colleagues alike that the work of the heart has never been more important. While you take time to rest body and soul in the next couple of months, be as kind and empathetic to yourself as you are to others.

Have a wonderful summer. **T**



CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH GAMING

By Zhaoliang Sun, River East Transcona Teachers' Association

In high school, gaming became one of my primary ways to connect with peers. While it wasn't mainstream at the time, it provided me with the opportunity to form meaningful and lasting friendships.

I spent many lunch breaks walking to my friend's house near the school to play games like *Super Smash Bros.* or *Halo*. These sessions weren't just about playing the games, they provided structure for social interaction through a shared common interest. Games have the capacity to enable not only fun, exciting, and memorable moments but also detailed depth for discussion, strategy and collaboration. Some of the people I met years ago through gaming remain part of my life today, including my wife.

Many of my peers weren't as extroverted as I was and really struggled to reach out socially at a young age. Their withdrawn personalities were enabled by the fact that gamers often faced labels such as 'nerd' or 'loser'. Having a shared hobby through video games helped me connect with them by breaking down barriers. It gave them a comfortable entry point into conversations and group settings, providing common ground without pressure. It was a privilege to see my awkward and quiet friends express a colourful level of engagement and enthusiasm that others rarely see. This experience still shapes how I approach building inclusive communities in my teaching practice.

The turning point for me in bringing gaming into school settings came when I saw how effective it was during a school fundraiser: a *Super Smash Bros. Melee*. The tournament was hosted by a student group and supervised by a teacher. I noticed fellow students participating who normally avoided other school activities. The atmosphere was lively and competitive,

bringing out energy from individuals who were known to be timid.

That experience showed me the potential of gaming to engage students beyond the usual groups. Experienced students were excited to show off their skills and others just had fun playing. Lots of what you would observe in a school sports event like sportsmanship and strategizing occurred during the fundraiser. While reflecting on student engagement during my career path, I wanted to carry this positive experience along to my school communities.

Later, as a student teacher, I had the opportunity to assist in an emerging eSports team and was introduced to the Manitoba Scholastic eSports Association (MSEA). In my first year of teaching, I launched our school's first official eSports club. The objective was straightforward: create an inclusive environment where students could engage through gaming in a structured, supportive space—especially those who weren't drawn to traditional sports or clubs.

Now, as part of my work teaching interactive digital media at Kildonan-East Collegiate in Winnipeg, I supervise a daily lunch-hour gaming program in the computer lab. The space includes multiple Nintendo Switch consoles and a dedicated TV. Students take turns, organize mini-tournaments, and frequently return with friends.

I also recruit players for MSEA's seasonal provincial tournaments, which run similarly to athletic seasons. We compete in games such as

Brawlhalla, Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, Rocket League, Valorant, and League of Legends. I'm fortunate to work with my colleagues David, Lex, and Rachel—who help supervise when I'm unavailable, ensuring that the students always have activities to look forward to.

In addition to eSports, I've also established and maintained a Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) club. It runs multiple times a week and remains consistently active. I lead some of the sessions and provide materials for student-led groups, including dice and adventure books. More than often, students participating in these clubs have trouble engaging with traditional school clubs. The social opportunities gaming clubs provide have been especially meaningful for students who tend to feel isolated or disconnected from other areas of school life.

One example that stands out is a student who joined with no background in competitive gaming. At first, she played passively and rarely communicated with her team. But she consistently showed up and practiced. Overtime, she developed initiative, took leadership during games, and became a strong communicator. Watching her progress was a clear reminder of how extracurricular opportunities like this can build confidence and personal development.

Many students who participate in these programs have formed lasting friendships. I often see small, quiet groups of students expand into inclusive peer networks that continue outside of the club setting. For me, that's one of the most valuable outcomes.



GAMING AS A PLATFORM FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Gaming is a practical context for developing communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. In team-based games, clear coordination is essential. Students learn quickly that success depends on them being able to share ideas, plan strategy, and make decisions together. These moments often generate disagreement, and I use them as teaching points to help students learn how to compromise and communicate respectfully.

Leadership development is also part of the club's structure. I assign team captains who take responsibility for organizing matches, reminding their team members about schedules, and keeping participation balanced. These students often grow into their roles, taking initiative without prompting. It also helps distribute responsibility and keeps the club student driven while I handle logistics and supervision.

Peer mentorship also develops naturally. More experienced players frequently help newer students learn mechanics or improve their gameplay. I've observed how this mentoring leads to increased confidence and reinforces a collaborative team culture. The result is a space where students actively support each other's

development rather than competing individually for recognition.

SUPPORTING BELONGING AND ATTENDANCE

Gaming clubs have had a direct impact on student engagement and school attendance. Several students have told me that eSports or D&D give them something exciting to look forward to at school. In some cases, students who were previously absent or disconnected became consistent attendees once they had a reason to feel connected to the community.

One parent shared that their child had become more sociable and respectful after joining the eSports club. They noted that the student had developed better sportsmanship, handled losses with maturity, and began setting goals for personal improvement. I've received similar feedback from other families, and it consistently reinforces that these clubs meet needs similar to that of other traditional extracurriculars.

JUST A GAME?

My experience running gaming and D&D clubs has shown that this is more than just a hobby for students, it's a structured opportunity for connection, growth, and leadership. Through

these activities, students have developed friendships, improved their communication skills, and taken on responsibility. Some have become more confident; others have simply found a consistent, safe space where they can relax and be part of something.

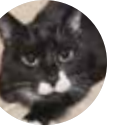
While gaming may still carry stereotypes for some, the reality in schools is different. For many students, it is the only place they feel seen. These programs offer a platform that is inclusive, skill-building, and sustainable with the right support. The effort I put in—whether organizing tournaments, supervising sessions, or mentoring players is consistently returned in the form of meaningful outcomes for students.

Looking back, I often think about how meaningful a program like this would have been for me as a student. While I found my way through informal gaming communities, having a structured club with school support would have created even more opportunities for connection and growth. It's rewarding to provide that now, to give students a space where they feel like they belong, where their interests are celebrated, and where their growth is visible. These clubs aren't just about playing games, they're about creating the kind of community I would have valued when I was in their shoes. [1](#)

TABLETOP GAMING IN SCHOOLS

By Mx. Kay Wojnarski, Louis Riel Teachers' Association (and their trusty sidekick, Juju)

Photos by @moon-25.bsky.social



A party of brave adventurers delve into ancient ruins in search of treasure. Powerful wizards meet on the battlefield, casting spells and summoning monsters to defeat their foes. A group of youths explore a haunted mansion, unaware of the traitor in their midst.



It would be easy to think that these kinds of gaming experiences would require a gaming console or at the very least a screen to watch, but these games take place at a regular table, pushing the bounds of imagination in an engaging and fun way for folks to socialize and create connections with each other. These games and their fandoms are becoming more inviting and inclusive than ever, in stark contrast to those who grew up feeling ostracized and alienated for their interests and hobbies, and tabletop games have a natural place in our

school community.

The term "tabletop games" literally came from different styles of games that are normally played on a table or flat surface, and may include cards, tokens, boards, papers or other kinds of materials. These are all different styles of tabletop games, which can include:

- Board games (Monopoly, Scrabble, Settlers of Catan)
- Card games (Apples to Apples, Go Fish, Uno)
- Collectible Card games (Magic: The

Gathering, Pokemon, Yu-gi-oh!)

- Dice (Farkle, Pig, Yahtzee)
 - Miniature wargaming (Battletech, Blood Bowl, Warhammer)
 - Tabletop Roleplaying Games, also known as RPGs (Dungeons & Dragons, Pathfinder, Starfinder)
 - Tile-based games (Bananagrams, Dominos, Mahjong)
 - Party games (Charades, Pictionary, Trivial Pursuit)
- Tabletop games can be competitive or

FOR MORE INFORMATION

ESPORTS

For more information on the Manitoba Scholastic eSports Association (MSEA), scan the QR code.





Photo by Matea Tuhtar



cooperative, or a combination of the two. One style of tabletop gaming is called German or Euro style, which involves indirect player interaction, a lack of player elimination, and multiple ways to earn points. Settlers of Catan is a popular Euro style tabletop game.

Tabletop gaming is a thriving industry which is projected to grow even more in the following years. In 2024, the tabletop games market was valued at approximately \$19.5 billion USD, and that figure is projected to reach 34.1 billion by the year 2030.

BENEFITS OF TABLETOP GAMES AT SCHOOL

The positive aspects of tabletop gaming at school extend far beyond providing a outlet for students to engage in a fun activity together, or even offering a break from constantly being in front of screens. On a social and emotional level, tabletop games have been shown to strengthen relationships, promote social interactions, build social skills, reduce stress and anxiety, encourage empathy, and foster teamwork. Tabletop gaming also enhances cognitive skills by boosting critical thinking skills, improving memory and focus, stimulating creativity and imagination, and increasing language skills. With so many potential benefits to young people, it makes sense to offer tabletop gaming as an organized

club at their schools.

There are also added benefits of having a tabletop club at school for students to attend: increasing confidence and self-esteem, improving social skills and collaboration, improving academic performance, and reducing stress. Most importantly, a school tabletop club can create a sense of belonging and connection that they may not find in other extracurricular activities. Young people who may feel ostracized and alone for their interests may find a safe space to explore their interests and passions while making connections with others. It is also a way for students to learn about new games without feeling intimidated by their lack of knowledge or experience, which can be especially important when wanting to learn a new game like Dungeons & Dragons that requires a group to play.

A common reason for reluctance to try tabletop gaming is the misconception that players need to be knowledgeable about the games they play, and it can be intimidating to try something new and possibly be wrong in front of a group. Please remember that the most important aspect to organizing any sort of tabletop gaming group is kindness through promoting an inclusive environment where it is okay to not know everything and that being wrong is not a dealbreaker. This can sometimes be difficult for educators who might feel out of their element with games that have extensive

rulesets like Dungeons & Dragons. But please do not let it discourage you from trying them and learning. Every player needs to start from a point of not knowing how a game works, and having a supportive group with more experienced players regardless of their age can help to get past that feeling of hesitation and have fun playing together.

STARTING A SCHOOL TABLETOP CLUB

Deciding to start a tabletop club at a school does offer a lot of benefits, but it can sometimes be confusing as to how to get started, given the vast amount of gaming material that exists and deciding what to include in your club. It can be easiest to break down the process into more manageable steps, starting with a planning stage.

1. Planning Stage: this is where you will start to connect with interested students or other staff who are eager to help organize a club at your school. Start off by brainstorming ideas as to what you want your club to offer, when and where you might be able to meet, what kind of games your group might want to play, making sure gaming content is school-appropriate, and what materials you might have or need to find. Define the purpose and goal of your club by describing what types of games you intend

to offer, what your meeting schedule will be, and how to communicate with others outside of club meetings through school calendars or announcements. Once this has been established, set up your first club meeting.

2. Meeting Stage: the first meeting is important to establish expectations of the club, such as respecting others, being a good sport, treating club materials gently, and making sure to clean up when meetings are done. It can also be helpful to have students or staff bring in their own games to share with and teach others how to play. Continue your meetings and maintain a consistent schedule while encouraging members to spread the word about the club by inviting their friends!

3. Improving Stage: once your club has gained enough momentum through consistent meetings and a regular batch of attendees, you might want to consider other ways to bring your club to the next level. You might want to organize a tournament or other special event, or start to reach out to neighbouring schools to expand your play groups. If you have technology-savvy members in your club, you might want to expand your presence online through creating a Discord server or sharing content on social media, such as painted miniatures on Instagram. Creating your own club gear can also foster a sense of pride and belonging; have artistic students help design a club logo that could be printed on badges, apparel or other merchandise. If you have the necessary resources for 3D printing, you might also consider making your own branded accessories such as club dice or custom miniatures for students to design and paint.

FINDING RESOURCES

If you are interested in starting a tabletop club at your school and do not know where to start, there is a vibrant tabletop community in Manitoba with a number of excellent local game stores eager to help educators bring the joy of tabletop games into schools. Some local businesses also offer discounts for educators who are buying resources for their schools and are experienced in giving advice for what kind of games your club might like best. Please check out and support your local gaming stores. In Winnipeg these include:



- GameKnight Games and Cool Stuff
- Galaxy Collectibles
- Victory Pints
- A Muse N Games
- Fusion Gaming

In addition, the yearly tabletop gaming convention GAME-itoba takes place in January and is a celebration of tabletop gaming in all its forms. The convention is an excellent place to see what games are new and popular and learn to play them while connecting with other helpful members of the community.

If you are interested in obtaining free resources online with some of the more popular franchises in tabletop gaming today, here are some valuable sources for educators:

- Dungeons & Dragons: the most recognized tabletop role-playing game by Wizards of the Coast offers teachers a free Educator License on their D&D Beyond online platform with all basic resources needed to play the game, which can then be shared with students who also have D&D Beyond accounts.
- Pathfinder/Starfinder: another vastly popular role-playing game, whose creator Paizo offers free digital resources for clubs to use and print by contacting their support email. Even without books, students can enjoy free character-building apps available online with Pathbuilder 2E and Starbuilder.
- Warhammer: the most popular miniature wargaming franchise offers teachers a free Educator Kit with minis, paints, tools, dice and lore through the Warhammer Alliance.

In addition, educators are welcome to attend the Gaming Association of Manitoba Educators (GAME) convention during MTS Professional Development Day to connect with like-minded professionals and learn about different ways of introducing games, both tabletop and digital, into classrooms and schools.

Tabletop gaming can be an excellent fit for students at any grade level, and there is a need for educators to help bring the joy and belonging of gaming to their schools. With all the benefits mentioned above, please consider offering this type of social experience at your school and you will be amazed at the positive reactions and growth you will notice in your students. You'll be giving them a space to thrive and excel while creating connections with others in a safe and inclusive environment. **T**



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WE HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO GROW STUFF IN OUR YARDS SO IF YOU HAVE EXCESS, SHARE. WHAT'S NICE IS THAT OUR STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO SECOND HARVEST, TO THE GARDENS, THE CHICKENS, THE BEES AND THEY'RE TAKING THAT INFORMATION AND BRINGING IT BACK TO THEIR HOME AND SHARING IT WITH THEIR FAMILIES.

ECO- EDUCATION IN ACTION:

BEES, CHICKENS,
AND GARDENS
POWER LEARNING
AT LEILA NORTH

By Matea Tuhtar, MTS Staff

At École Leila North Community School, learning comes to life in some rather novel ways: through chickens, bees, gardens, and even aquaponics. At the heart of it all is Left Eye Lisa, a one-eyed, toe-less chicken who has become a beloved therapy animal and classroom mascot. Lisa is just one feathered part of a thriving urban agriculture program led by teachers Pam Godfredsen and Ashley Taylor, whose dedication to hands-on learning has transformed their school into a vibrant hub of sustainability, empathy, and community connection. What started with a few classroom-hatched eggs has grown into a multi-year vision: one egg, honeycomb, and happy chicken at a time.

Taylor, a grades 6-8 foods and nutrition and sustainability teacher, says that Lisa lives the life of luxury, going home with her over the summer and joining her family at the cabin where she hangs out on the beach or the boat. “She loves my kids and she’s very attached to them—she panics when she can’t see them.”

**BUILDING A VISION,
ONE EGG AT A TIME**

Lisa lives in Taylor’s classroom due to her special needs but the rest of the Leila North flock is housed outside in a chicken coop in front of the school. The chicken project began almost a decade ago. To start, Taylor would bring in eggs and hatch them to show the kids and then bring them to a farm. The plan to house them at the school would take almost seven years from start to fruition. “There was a vision that a lot of us had, and then it was just trying to find the right people to support that vision and make sure we had all the pieces in place before rushing into it,” says Taylor.

“I think you just have to have the right teachers who have a passion to do it right and who are willing to put in the extra time,” says Godfredsen, who teaches sustainability and photography and is Taylor’s main partner when it comes to the flora and fauna of the school. The two work together to take care of the animals and figure out issues along the way.

“We’ve had to figure this out and do the research,” says Taylor. “We’re constantly bouncing ideas off of each other – we have this problem, what’s the solution? We reach out to our vet, or to other people who also house chickens and figure out a plan and how to move forward.”

The chicken’s care is supplemented by fundraising, and the teachers stress that you shouldn’t have animals if you’re not fully prepared to take care of them. “Things pop up and it’s a big commitment, it’s a responsibility you have to be prepared for,” says Godfredsen.

The chicken coop was built by a fellow teacher in the division and today houses 21 hens who provide eggs almost every day which are collected and used in lessons or donated to the community.

**BEES ON THE ROOF AND
SWEET REWARDS**

The school also has three bee hives on the roof with plans to get a few more. “We want to make sure we have the resources for all the students to have these experiences. It’s really bringing learning to life.”

The honey will be harvested with the students in the fall. “We’ll usually lay out plastic bags outside and then scrape the honey off of the frames,” says Godfredsen. “So the students are quite involved. They get to see the structure of

the combs, they can smell it. And they’re super pumped to taste the honey comb as well.”

Bees will make honey from the flowers and plants available nearby, so each hive in the city makes its own ‘neighborhood honey’ that tastes unique to the location. “The honey we have here is completely different from the honey I have at home,” says Taylor. “It’s a different color, and it’s got different flavor notes.” The honey that’s collected from the hives is gifted to students or guests.

One new project this year that Taylor and Godfredsen are excited about is having an observation hive at the school. “So in September or maybe even June we’ll go up and pick up a couple of frames of bees, we’ll put them in the observation hive and then we’ll bring them downstairs. And the students will be able to watch the bees working or moving about in the hive,” explains Taylor.

**FROM THE COOP TO
THE CLASSROOM**

The chickens and their eggs lend to a lot of lessons in the classroom, from sustainability to biology, and beyond. The two teachers say their courses blend well together when it comes to working with the animals, and they’ve also created chicken and bee kits for the library to help teachers incorporate the learning into any subject area.

“There’s a lot of crossover to other classes like math or art. Pam might be teaching chicken anatomy in her class and then the kids will come here and they’re working with the eggs and making French Toast and I can ask them questions about how the eggs are laid and circle back to a lesson that Pam has done.”

When students learned to tell if an egg is fresh or not, it sparked a conversation about refrigeration and how some countries sell unrefrigerated eggs. “We have a variety of students from a lot of different places at our school and it’s neat to tie that into the lesson,” says Godfredsen.

Taylor and Godfredsen say that the students respond well to the animals. “I had one kid who wasn’t as engaged at the beginning of class so it took me a little bit to reach him,” says Godfredsen, “and now every class he asks me to go see the chickens and collect eggs together.”

The teachers have hatched their own chickens but warn that you have to be prepared and have a plan when hatching eggs. “One year we had about 57 eggs to hatch and most of them ended

up being roosters,” laughs Godfredsen. “We can’t keep roosters here so you need to have a plan to rehome the birds you can’t keep.” The two have also hatched turkeys and guinea fowl and say that the students find it very interesting to see the different eggs and chicks.

Godfredsen remembers a special chicken named Connie who used to travel with her to other schools when she taught chicken keeping. “She used to ride in the passenger seat beside me and then I would just carry her in. We had the kids sit in a circle and I’d bring her favorite snacks and the kids could pet her and learn about her.”

Taylor is quick to point out that not every chicken has the same personality. “Some of them are sociable and want to be around you, and some want you to stay away. So it’s a good way for kids to learn about those social cues. Lisa doesn’t like to be touched, she’s cool hanging out by you but that’s all she wants. Just like not everyone in your class wants a hug or wants you in their space.”

The chickens are let out of their coop most days if it’s not really cold out and Godfredsen says that students will sit out there all through their lunch and hang out with them. They’ve even learned to corral the occasional escapee back into the enclosure. The community around Leila North also visits regularly and keeps an eye on the coop when school is out and having them involved over the years has been very helpful.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

“We consulted with the community before we added the bees, and we recently started a chicken email (“the chicken hotline”) because we had some problems with vandalism in the past. So now we have an email where community members can reach us quickly if they notice something is amiss, or if a chicken got loose,” says Godfredsen. “The community cares about them, they visit them or bring their kids to see them. The community is an important piece to whether these programs are successful.”

In addition to the chickens and bees, the teachers also have aquariums, including an aquaponics system. “I’ve got tilapia and a catfish in there and it’s basically a cyclic system that works together with plants,” says Godfredsen. “We did house plants this term so the kids learned propagation and to grow their own plants which they can then take home to their parents.”

Leila North also has a garden that they share



with the fire hall next door who help water it during the summer. The garden includes vegetables and flowers which are planted by the kids and visited by the bees and also provide extra treats for the chickens.

In the summer the school hosts a free food giveaway every Tuesday including bread through Second Harvest, produce and the chicken eggs they collect from the coop. Community members will also bring excess produce from their own gardens. “We’re really trying to send the message to share what you have, rather than going to waste.”

“We know food prices are crazy,” says

Taylor. “We have the capability to grow stuff in our yards so if you have excess, share. What’s nice is that our students have access to Second Harvest, to the gardens, the chickens, the bees and they’re taking that information and bringing it back to their home and sharing it with their families.”

**SHARING INSPIRATION AND
KNOWLEDGE**

If all of this sounds like a lot of work, it is, but the two teachers stress that you have to love what you do. “It has to fill your passion and make your heart happy, absolutely,” says Taylor.

“What we explain to people when we’re doing our presentations is that you have to have the right people,” says Godfredsen. “You can’t have people that are like ‘I don’t feel like going out today’. Because even when it’s super cold in the winter we’re there, sometimes twice a day, checking on them and making sure they’re okay. You also need people who will fill in for you when you’re gone.”

Taylor and Godfredsen have presented about their projects at MTS PD Day, and will do so again this fall. They’re also available to answer questions for anyone thinking about starting similar endeavours at their schools. **T**

BUILDING CONNECTIONS THROUGH DIALOGUE

By Izzeddin Hawamda, Ph.D.

As I grew up in Palestine, my grandfather spent many years teaching me and other children in my family the importance of dialogue. In Arabic my grandfather would often tell us *Asmeny mleeah ashan nearf nehkey* “listen to me well so we can talk together.” As my grandfather said those words, he would bring all of us to our land and start working on watering the lemon trees, fixing the fence so the sage plant could grow bigger, creating small canals so water could make it to the far away fig tree. He would do all of this while talking to us about life. He would ask a question and say, “If you don’t know the answer, ask the rumoan, “the pomegranate”.

Dialogue is an essential process in building compassion and understanding toward others. I learned early on that dialogue takes many shapes and forms as my grandfather would always say, “Don’t worry how different my talk is from yours, if we are talking, it’s a start.” After he would say these things, he would lean against an olive tree and make sage tea and call us around to ask us for advice on what to do with the far away apricot tree that didn’t seem to grow quickly. From these beginnings I was equipped with lots of curiosity and the love of having tea with strangers as I shared stories with them. My childhood led me to create relationships that helped me carve stories from my heart onto pages and connected me with different communities that strengthened my growth and narrative.

INTERGROUP DIALOGUE FOR PEACEBUILDING

Intergroup dialogue for peacebuilding differs from more conventional forms of peace talks or negotiation, in that the goal is to connect with individuals in mid-level

positions of power, grassroots organizers and organizations, and the people impacted by the conflict. Intergroup dialogue or problem-solving in the context of conflict resolution or peacebuilding is based on theories, principles, and strategies from many different fields of study.

As a model for intervention, Intergroup Dialogue began in the early 1990s based on the compilation of research in the fields of conflict resolution, social psychology, and multicultural education (Frantell et al, 2019). Research (Kelman, 2012; Svensson & Brounéus, 2013; Frantell, 2019) suggests that the current foundations for the implementation of intergroup dialogue programs or workshops are based on Gordon Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis and preceding works on contact theory. Allport (1954) hypothesized that much discrimination and prejudice was a result of individuals having limited to no face-to-face contact with others, and that bringing people together to engage in dialogue would “bring about positive attitude change” (Svensson, 2013).

Multicultural education theory built on the findings of the contact hypothesis (Allport’s (1954) findings and those of studies in the following years) by developing steps and stages that could be synthesized into manageable curriculum which would allow teachers or instructors to receive training in order to implement programming in classroom settings (including within higher education) (Frantell, 2019; Corry, 2012).

In the early 1990s, Herbert Kelman, a social psychologist who specializes in social ethics, facilitated intergroup problem-solving workshops in Israel and Palestine, which he continued for more

than thirty years (Corry, 2012). Building on the research of the time, Kelman developed a four-stage model which, at present, remains as the primary structure for Intergroup Dialogue programs, workshops, and studies (Corry, 2012).

INTERACTION, COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) focuses on highlighting the principles of social justice and honouring individual values through a process of interaction, communication, and community building. IGD programs challenge participants to engage critically with their own identity group and examine the biases and stereotypes that exist within that group. In doing so, participants can build alliances and relationships. The process involves bringing ‘privileged’ and ‘disadvantaged’ groups together along with facilitators that represent each group. They meet at regular intervals in an effort to explore topics such as privilege, oppression, and systemic barriers, and to develop skills that promote the use of dialogue in addressing conflict.

The heavy influences of multicultural education and social psychology on the development of Intergroup Dialogue processes contribute to the tendency to use it in educational settings. The goal here is to build effective emotional and experiential connections between students that will contribute to an increased ability to express emotions and develop a politicized identity (Ross, 2012; Frantell et al., 2019).

The use of Intergroup Dialogue in educational settings is intended to engage conflicting parties in

the process of analyzing their own suspicions, perceptions, and potential misconceptions that have contributed to the continuation of the conflict or resulting barriers. However, one must be mindful that educational settings differ from one another so that ensuring an environment where participants can meet safely and speak freely can be nearly impossible.

There is also often the added pressure of expecting any peacebuilding intervention to resolve conflict in a timely manner. This is not only unrealistic but also counter to the intentions of authentic forms of Intergroup Dialogue. The process brings together different parties to discuss and learn about each other. Participants who join IGD programs show a change of attitudes and can develop skills to better their relationships. Participants learn to work through hard topics and work on increasing their awareness of one’s self and their group.

IGD focuses on exploring the participants’ own experiences and



IN THE EARLY 1990s, HERBERT KELMAN, A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST WHO SPECIALIZES IN SOCIAL ETHICS, FACILITATED INTERGROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING WORKSHOPS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE, WHICH HE CONTINUED FOR MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS.

relating them to the group’s experiences. In doing this, a common understanding and empathy is built. It can also help teach dialogue skills to the participants,

which will increase their confidence and help them engage in meaningful conversations. It also promotes social justice and works on helping participants understand their own identity while examining their bias of other identities. As a result, studies show that IGD can help increase participants’ abilities to engage in a group dialogue and develop greater strengths of all behaviors.

In my culture, the narrative tradition has remained strong as a result of the systemic oppression and exclusion of my culture from formal education and popular media even within Palestine. Through generations and across cultures, storytelling has played an important role in informing and connecting people with each other. Telling stories allows people to build an understanding of the experiences of others, to bond over shared feelings and experiences, and to spread important information such as cultural practices, religious beliefs, or survival skills.

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DILIGENCE AND FAIRNESS:

THE COMMISSIONER OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT REFLECTS

By Anne Bennett, MTS Staff



It’s fair to say the road to proclamation for Bill 35, the Education Administration Amendment Act, was long, winding and bumpy. Introduced on March 13, 2023, the legislation created a teacher registry along with a structure for hearing complaints filed against public school educators. It was and continues to be widely embraced as an essential step forward in ensuring student safety.

While neither Manitoba teachers nor their union objected at any time to legislation intent on protecting students, Bill 35’s vague language, undefined processes, and confusion around the apparent role of disciplinary panels in determining teaching competence were concerning.

In the midst of all that, one thing was abundantly clear: the legislation’s effectiveness would hinge largely upon the person appointed to oversee day-to-day operations and shape credible processes rooted in transparency, fairness and due process.

In January, 2025, Bobbi Taillefer was appointed the inaugural commissioner of teacher professional conduct. Eminently qualified, her education career spans more than 30 years in roles ranging from bilingual teacher and school principal to 21 years at The Manitoba Teachers’ Society as a teacher welfare staff officer, assistant general secretary and general secretary. Taillefer went on to become deputy general secretary with the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, Canada’s largest teacher union, and most recently executive director with the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation.

No stranger to serving on investigative panels herself, in the early 2000s Taillefer was a lay-person representative with Correctional Service Canada on a panel investigating inmate deaths by suicide or murder in federal penitentiaries.

“So I’ve had experience looking at systems and understand the

importance of their reliability, safety and effectiveness. It also gave me an appreciation for the public lens in a professional context.”

A former president of the Winnipeg Humane Society, Taillefer has also served on the boards of The North Portage Development Corporation, Taking Charge! and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation. She currently sits on the board of The Leonard Foundation, a financial assistance program for undergrad students in Canadian universities and colleges.

All of this experience will inform her work as commissioner, Taillefer says. “The role is very exciting to me. It’s a big responsibility, and one I take extremely seriously.”

Taillefer understands the trepidation MTS and its membership have felt about Bill 35, however she sees the registry and accountability framework as a positive thing for the education sector in Manitoba.

“I believe in the role that this system can play,” she says. “The thing to remember is that it provides an additional measure for student safety and clear standards for teachers.”

Taillefer commends MTS for its advocacy on behalf of members and appreciates the candid, thoughtful dialogue that has taken place with all education stakeholders. She also appreciates the stress that ambiguity creates.

“It’s very helpful, I think, to put the

work of the registry and the disciplinary process into perspective. For the vast majority of teachers, their experience with the registry will be that their name will be published, and that’s it. For a small percentage it will be an accountability measure for the public and future employers. But we’re talking about a very small number within the educator population.”

For context, in Saskatchewan in 2023-24, a total of 33 complaints were received by the province’s Professional Conduct Committee, 14 of which were not investigated or were found to require no further action after investigation. The total number of members of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation is 13,000.

“It’s important that we maintain focus on the intent of the legislation, which is to provide another level of protection for students and accountability within the system. That shared understanding is critical.”

Taillefer commends the framework established in our provincial model as one that was informed by best practices in other jurisdictions.

“The government looked at what worked and what didn’t in other provinces and created a made in Manitoba solution. In my opinion it fulfills the intent of the legislation in a way that upholds the standards of the profession.

“For example, the legislation in Manitoba is set up to deal with misuse of process right off the bat, with the commissioner being able to dismiss complaints found to be vexatious.

“Having worked in two provinces that have registries (Ontario and Saskatchewan), I can say that the legislation in Manitoba is the best I’ve experienced. I believe they got it right, and that ultimately parents and teachers will think so, too.”

Another upside according to Taillefer: the Manitoba model avoids the creation of a large, costly and cumbersome bureaucracy established elsewhere. “There’s just no need for that, given the relatively few complaints that go the distance.

“The folks at the Ministry of

“IT’S VERY HELPFUL, I THINK, TO PUT THE WORK OF THE REGISTRY AND THE DISCIPLINARY PROCESS INTO PERSPECTIVE. FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF TEACHERS, THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH THE REGISTRY WILL BE THAT THEIR NAME WILL BE PUBLISHED, AND THAT’S IT. FOR A SMALL PERCENTAGE IT WILL BE AN ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURE FOR THE PUBLIC AND FUTURE EMPLOYERS. BUT WE’RE TALKING ABOUT A VERY SMALL NUMBER WITHIN THE EDUCATOR POPULATION.”

Education are also extremely skilled and professional,” she adds. “Work around certification, for example, is critical, and the depth of their knowledge adds another layer of oversight to the process.”

Taillefer also references the significant pool of knowledgeable, dedicated individuals representing both teachers and the public who can be drawn upon for disciplinary proceedings.

“All of these factors combine to facilitate the efficient, effective, transparent and timely resolution of disciplinary matters.”

One of the things I appreciate about the legislation is that it contemplates the idea of vexatious claims and gives the commissioner the power to dismiss them. The disciplinary process is not a tool to harm people with. It’s a means of ensuring professionalism and accountability in the best interests of all.”

Taillefer emphasizes that the complaint and investigation process does not replace the essential HR function of a school division as the employer.

“Our work will not be arbitrary or capricious. Teachers can be assured that this is an intentional, deliberate and careful process. We are aware of the high stakes involved and treat our responsibility with the utmost seriousness.”

One of the key determinants of success, says Taillefer, is transparency.

“That is essential to building trust and confidence in the process for all concerned. When people see us adhere to the legislation and rules of practice, when we continue to dialogue and collaborate, it will hopefully reassure folks that the intent of the legislation is being followed and the process can be relied upon.”

She adds that the only time the openness of a process would be restricted would be to protect students and not retraumatize them.

As for what guides her in her work, Taillefer points to the qualities that have informed her entire career.

“My north star is always diligence and fairness. These will be essential to my work as commissioner, as is consistency and the ethical administration of the legislation.

The commissioner says she’s happy to take on a vital role that has her continuing to be involved in education.

“That is my passion. I’m looking forward to working with all education stakeholders and to participating in ongoing collaboration and dialogue. We all want this process to work effectively for the benefit of students and the teaching profession alike. I want the processes to be beyond reproach.”

WOMEN STEERING CHANGE IN DYNAMIC TIMES

By Lia Gervino, Retired MTS Staff

Sometimes, the simplest questions resonate with you and change the way you see the world. I was in high school, and our ELA class was preparing to examine a passage written by Margaret Atwood. As part of the lesson, our teacher introduced us to Penelope, the mother of Telemachus from Homer's *The Odyssey*.



In a scene, Telemachus scolds his mother Penelope as she enters the great hall because she requested that the entertainer choose a 'cheerier' song. Telemachus becomes angry and declares that "speech is the business of men" and that his mother should return to her quarters to continue her weaving. Our teacher asked, "Is this true; is speech the business of men?" The discussion in class that day was rich and that question still resonates with me.

Here's another question, do women continue to redefine the notion that they

somehow have no voice and reshape what it means to lead? I believe so.

Let me take you back to the year 2000; ultimately, it had rolled in much like any other year despite the dire warnings of the world coming to an end. That was also the year that I became a single mother, signed a permanent full-time contract in the public school system and shortly after, was accepted into the Post-Baccalaureate program at the University of Manitoba.

Fast forward a few more years. I earned a second Post Baccalaureate and my Masters degree. During that time, I served as vice president of a Local teachers' association and became a student services teacher dedicated to creating educational programming for students with exceptional needs. In September of 2011, I became a staff officer of The Manitoba Teachers' Society and shortly thereafter, was honoured to have the Women and Leadership (WAL) portfolio assigned to me.

I began researching the Society's history of women in political leadership positions and no surprise, right from its inception, the women of the Society championed equity—pensions, equal pay, equitable access to employment regardless of marital status, maternity and parental leaves and much more. These women, too numerous to mention here, modeled a communal

leadership style emphasizing collaboration, empathy, and inclusivity, often standing shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts. They are commemorated on the very first Women and Leadership (WAL) poster created by the Society in 2022.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AND WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

I am convinced, women in effective positions of leadership not only inspire other women to lead, they normalize the very conventions that foster mentorship, spaces for reflection, vital networks of support and more. Women have influence and bring unique perspectives, experiences and expertise that not only support women, but society as a whole. I can't imagine the women of the Society I researched, hesitating and seeking permission to do the work they saw as important. They saw a need, spoke up and lead the path to solutions; solutions by the way, that cemented teaching as a viable profession and not a *stepping stone job* to something better!

CHALLENGES PERSIST

Through the various events and initiatives created at MTS, strong women leaders shared with us that even though they had the same

qualifications as their male counterparts, they second-guessed their credentials and hesitated to put their name forward for consideration. When I think back on my leadership path, I wish I had taken a less circuitous route. I was aware that people had pre-conceived notions about my abilities to succeed associated with my gender and circumstances and so I, too, second-guessed my abilities and qualifications.

Ultimately, I came to realize that my path was unique and while I often felt isolated, under-qualified, exhausted and yes, very naive, I was determined to embrace change and accept new opportunities. I learned, slowly at first, the importance of finding mentors and to seek their advice when I had questions about how to navigate conflicting leadership responsibilities with more personal ones. For those mentors I am eternally grateful.

Representation matters, but so does fostering spaces for women to learn, network, voice their opinions and lead. Barriers like stereotypes, self-doubt, and unequal access to opportunities endure. Effective strategies must include authentic organizational support networks put in place by those in charge. Resolutions at the Annual General Meeting of the Provincial Council and support of the Provincial Executive members, the Senior Leadership Team and staff were vital and supported my efforts. The WAL series was created and over the years, MTS members

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were able to take advantage of meeting and having conversations with over 100 strong women who shared their leadership stories and expertise.

Our guests also confirmed that when women allowed others to speak for them, they lost their ability to show how empowered women step up to reshape the present and future. The overall call to action always encouraged those of us present to use our voice and speak up! In fact, one of our symposium and WAL Network presenters, Jane Kise, insisted that we not only step up, but step in!

THE FUTURE

I retired from the Society this past March and am excited that initiatives under the WAL series will continue to expand. To quote Sybil Shack, "A battle never stays won. Memories are short, and issues once resolved have an ugly habit of reappearing as if they had never been considered before".

I was very fortunate to play a part in laying the groundwork for the WAL series in collaboration with many members of staff in all departments. I also know that I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me. The world is at our feet and as one symposium presenter, Cynthia Bird said, "We hold up half the sky together".

And like Penelope, women's resilience, wit and unique approach to leadership continue to reshape our narratives, proving speech and leadership are not just the business of men, far from it! Despite stereotypes labeling collaborative styles as weak, or aggressive styles as "power-hungry," I witnessed how society as a whole is ready for a more collaborative, empathic and inclusive style of leadership that challenges outdated norms.

My wish is that the work of the Society in this area continues to grow, with fresh ideas and strategies. I am most grateful for the opportunity to have served the members of MTS in this capacity, and I wish all of you the best that the future can provide for you. ①



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THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

A PLACE FOR YOU IN YOUR UNION:

PILOT PROJECT EXPANDS OPPORTUNITY FOR MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

By **Cynthia Taylor**, MTS Vice President

Each year around the time of the Provincial Council AGM, MTS puts out the call for members to join one of the Society’s Standing Committees. These groups have informed the work of MTS for many years, bringing essential member perspectives and priorities into the work of the union. Areas of focus have included education finance, Indigenous voice, equity and social justice, curriculum development, professional development, workplace health and safety, collective bargaining, and disability benefits.

At the 104th Provincial Council, delegates passed Resolution 2023-35, directing the Provincial Executive to strike an ad hoc committee to look at ways of increasing member engagement in the union and continuing to be responsive to evolving needs.

The ad hoc’s task: Develop and recommend a revision/replacement of the current standing committee structure, scope, function, and composition. I wish to express gratitude to Lindsay Brown and Cathy Pleskach for joining me on this journey of consultation and pilot project creation. A huge thank you to MTS Staff, specifically Cheryl Chuckry and Brahim Ould Baba in his role as Director (Interim) Professional Status, along with Local association presidents, Provincial Executive members, and standing committees members, both past and present, for the guidance, dialogue and support. Your dedication to the work of the union has been vital and will continue to inform MTS efforts to engage our membership more broadly.

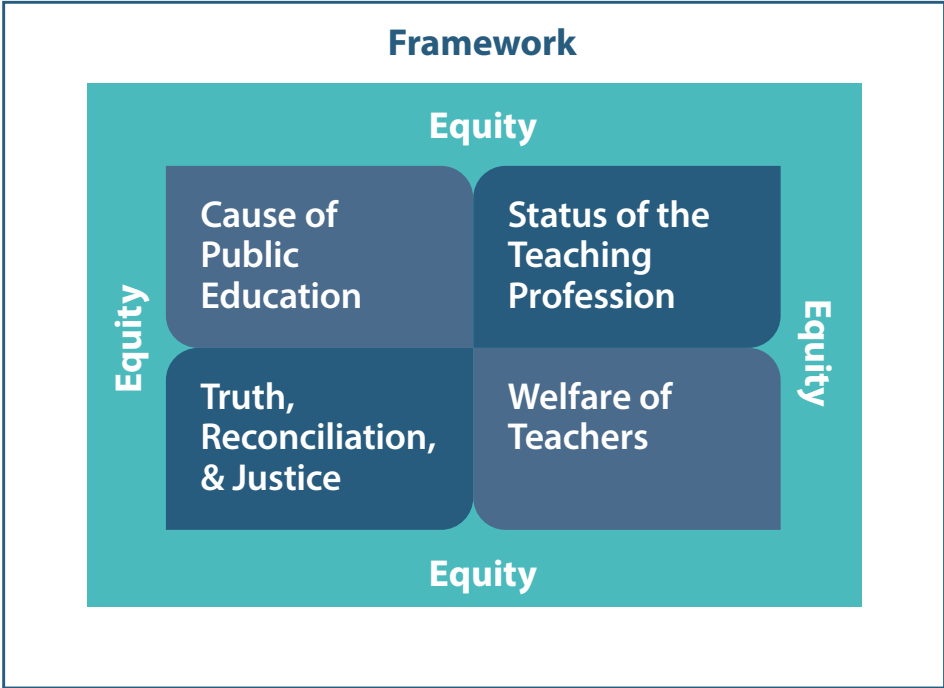
PILOT PROJECT FOCUS

Rooted in a commitment to equity, four areas of focus have been defined to provide a foundation for the pilot project. These take into consideration the current mission, values, and objectives of the Society. They are:

- The welfare of teachers
- The cause of public education
- The status of the teaching profession
- Truth, reconciliation and justice

After a year of extensive consultation including a broadly based member survey

(Educate Us: Member Survey October 2024), the pilot project proposed a format for teacher working groups. Comprised of MTS members and chaired by a member at large from the Provincial Executive, working groups are designed to be action oriented and focused on priorities as well as emerging topics and



trends in education and unionism. Once the pilot concludes in 2027, the membership would need to approve changes to the MTS bylaws, policies and budget to move forward with the working group structure.

WE NEED YOU! MTS WORKING GROUPS

A total of eight working groups of eight members each have been created.

- They are:
- Education funding
 - Protecting public education
 - Addressing violence in the workplace
 - Member well-being
 - Countering hate
 - Truth and reconciliation
 - Promoting the profession
 - Practicing the profession

We need you and your passion and expertise! Members are encouraged to review the list and

submit their name to be part of a group via the online Member Engagement Form. If you want to be part of creating tangible, meaningful change both within our union and beyond, I hope you will lend your voice to this opportunity. You’ll find more information on working groups here <https://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/2025/04/17/mts-member-engagement/> or click the QR code for more information.



SPOTLIGHT ON SAGEs

Spotlight on SAGEs is a regular feature designed to highlight opportunities for enrichment and inspiration offered by the MTS Special Area Groups of Educators.



MANITOBA SCHOOL COUNSELLORS’ ASSOCIATION (MSCA)

The Manitoba School Counsellors’ Association (MSCA) is a special area group of educators, made up of individuals working or interested in the field of guidance and counselling. Our objectives are to promote and develop guidance and counselling services for children and youth, and to promote and provide training for school counsellors and professionals in related areas. MSCA provides an open forum and network for discussion of current issues in school counselling through our monthly meetings, our quarterly journal, and professional development opportunities.

To learn more visit msca.mb.ca or scan the QR code.



MANITOBA MUSIC EDUCATORS’ ASSOCIATION (MMEA)

The Manitoba Music Educators’ Association (MMEA) believes music education helps students create meaningful relationships with others, building a sense of community within a school as well as creating connections in the wider community. Through collaboration among music educators and between educators, parents, the music industry, educational leaders and other stakeholders, MMEA comes together to fundamentally advance music education initiatives. We value cooperation with school divisions, provincial and national professional organizations and governments.

To learn more visit mymmea.ca or scan the QR code.



THE PRINCIPAL OF THE THING:

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS ADVOCATE

By **Chris Hicks**, Chair, Council of School Leaders (COSL)

Occasionally I get cornered into a discussion that boils down to one essential question: “What, actually, does a school principal do?” Disclosure: I comment here as a principal, but I am proudly aware and appreciative of the legitimacy that the principal does not define all the leadership in a school.

The best chats originate when the curious party discovers what I do for a career, because at that point they have a hard time reconciling their perspective of me with the stuffy, cantankerous grouch they say their own principal was (that’s if they even remember their principal). Personally, I can’t recall ever having had a cantankerous principal, nor having met one along my more than 30-year path in education. Why? Because they are too busy. Petulant, tetchy school leaders can’t survive in current school environments. The “role” if you will, is too fluid—and I mean that literally as well as figuratively. As a principal I could just as easily carry a plunger as I would a textbook.

As (ahem) fluid as the role may be, there are of course some essential roles that even I have to admit to. In a certain way they are entrenched in that they are legislated in the *Public Schools Act and Education Administration Act*. That said, the law really just establishes responsibilities—for safety, instruction, supervision, discipline, budget, evaluation, attendance. In other words, everything. But does this really define the role? I don’t think so, which is why I love the job. If safety is covered, evaluations happen, attendance tracked



and so on, I get some freedom to experiment. So, let’s explore this:

School leadership seems to always be in a state of flux, and the startup mentality (think of the focus of tech companies on

the latest thing or trend) hasn’t helped. We know that it takes time to make a difference with kids and families, though you rarely get that impression from the change-agent industry hell-bent on

making you feel inadequate and out of touch. Another factor relates to my firm conviction that the school leadership, or the principalship, is not a thing; it’s a person, a way of being. The role is more about who you are than what you’re supposed to do.

The closest I could come to identifying the role of a principal is rooted in my perspective that for all intents and purposes it is impossible for school principals to leave their personal values at the door. How can you assign a role to a principal if they are just going to filter it through their values system? My position is you can’t. Or shouldn’t. In many situations, your values are all you have.

So it’s pretty tough to land on one solid answer to the question, “what is the role of a principal”. I may have a broad and evolving view of my job, but I do know, with conviction, who I am, what interests me (usually) and what compels me to act.

For example, I am more interested in interaction with people than I am with policy, and I’m drawn to risk takers. By the same token, I am generally brutal with details and the small things that are so important in organising (“What? That’s important?!?” The answer is always “yes”). I also think kids and staff should have near unfettered access to me during the day. If my office door is closed, you know it’s a big deal.

So here is what I think. If I’m bound by diplomacy to give my inquisitive friend a serious answer about what my role is, I will say advocacy. I am a principal advocate.

PRINCIPAL AS ADVOCATE

I got really interested in advocacy as a primary role of the school principal the first time I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Friere (2017). It’s a short book, packed with power, putting education and learning at the centre of any movement to emancipate marginalised people from oppression, poverty, and socio-political exclusion.

If you know of any attempt to level the societal playing field, it will have most assuredly relied on advocacy. While I



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would consider advocacy as a critical component in educational leadership, there is a notable deficiency in scholarship on it. Leadership standards, where they exist in written form, rarely include advocacy as a major role, or core competency. Compare that with the American School Counsellor Association which lists advocacy as one of the primary competencies. That makes sense. Counsellors are perennially in somebody’s corner. I’m not sure, though, that this same role has been named for principals. We do it, but how often do we call it advocacy, and would we ever consider it an official competency?

We get a lot of mileage by referring to principals as the cornerstone of school direction and vision, etc. Principals are, as previously noted, responsible for the plugged plumbing and the instructional programming. The duties also go beyond the administrative to include advocating for the needs and rights of students, families and communities.

Identifying barriers to success—not only academic ones, but language, socioeconomic challenges—means seeking access to resources within and outside the school. Principals advocate for staff by exploring professional opportunities to learn and grow. Someone also needs to advocate for ensuring fair working

conditions, positive and collaborative work environments, and encouraging leadership development.

Then come communities. Who isn’t connected, and tightly, to their respective communities. This is the kind of advocacy that inspired “Nello’s Law” and cultivates respect and care which then finds its way into the school.

I’ll end with a couple of suggestions for effective advocacy (not the last word by any means but hopefully will generate discussion).

First: build relationships, meaningfully. I know this sounds like a cliché, and maybe it is, but it doesn’t make it any less true. We have to talk to each other and trust each other. Then we can work together.

Second: make use of the talent you have at your disposal. Educators are incredibly resourceful and creative people. Asking them to help you does not imply you are an incompetent leader. It means you want their help.

Third: read, inquire, and learn. Data, evidence, and studies expand your understanding of what direction you want to set. Even though you might know what you want to do, it is worth your time and effort to imagine more possibilities and learning from colleagues who have things to offer for your own development.

These suggestions aren’t incredibly original, but I believe advocacy is a fundamental element of a school principal’s role. Without these foundations, it is hard to make room for the people you’re responsible for to do what they do best.

There are barriers, of course. Resource limits, funding restrictions, political and philosophical resistance, and probably the odd petty personal grievance can all make an impact. Recognising the barriers can also just be a springboard for another level of advocacy.

My aim here is to introduce what I consider to be an essential though rarely acknowledged role of a school principal. The role may be fluid and even uncertain at times. Still, everyone has a corner, and that corner usually needs someone to stand in it. **T**

BOOK REVIEWS

By **Natashia Herring**, Louis Riel School Division / **Erin Thomas**, River East Transcona School Division



BUT YOU DON'T LOOK AUTISTIC AT ALL

Author: Bianca Toeps
Publisher: Toeps Media

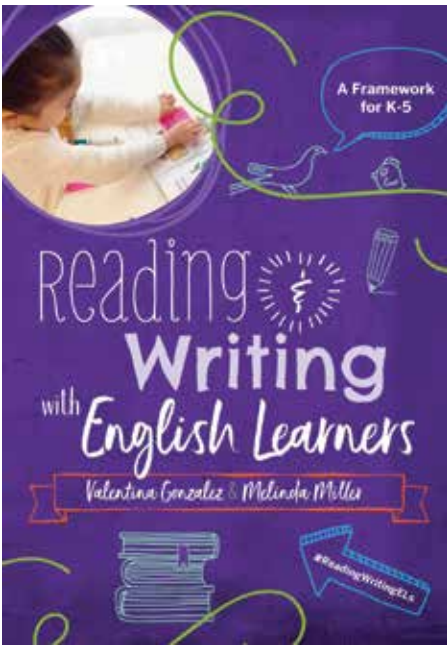
But You Don't Look Autistic at All is a first-hand account of what life can be like when you are autistic. Toeps is both methodical and sometimes humorous as she takes her readers through her personal journey from childhood when she was diagnosed autistic, to her adulthood adventures in Tokyo as a photographer and author. She also shares the stories of others to offer additional perspectives on living in a world designed for neurotypicals, where autism and other forms of neurodivergence are still greatly misunderstood across an individual's lifespan.

Toeps offers refreshing perspectives based in facts and personal experiences as she explains autism according to the medical lens, after which she guides you through an autistic lens to understand the social misconceptions, types of stimuli, behaviours, executive functions, early

Reviewed By: Natashia Herring

vs. late diagnosis, the ups and downs, and the boundaries and limitations some folks experience. Toeps offers excellent tips in each of these areas for allistics–non-autistic folks–to better understand, interact, and support individuals who are autistic.

This book challenges readers to look beyond the stereotypes and to broaden their understanding of autism. While Toeps highlights the many ways that autistic individuals can thrive in society, she brings attention to the necessity of partnership, and that it is not a one way street where those facing the barriers are the only ones taking initiative to eliminate them. This book is an excellent read for anyone looking to dispel myths and stereotypes of autism, support fellow employees in the workplace, or better understand family, friends, or community members.



READING & WRITING WITH ENGLISH LEARNERS

Author: Valentina Gonzalez and Melinda Miller
Publisher: Seidlitz Education

Reading and Writing with English Learners is a valuable resource for K-5 educators seeking to support English learners in literacy. The authors provide a practical framework for balanced literacy instruction, integrating reading and writing to foster both language development and comprehension.

The book stands out for its practical strategies. Techniques such as mini-lessons, read-alouds, and scaffolding are detailed, empowering teachers to create inclusive and supportive classrooms. The focus on culturally responsive teaching is particularly important, encouraging educators to select diverse texts that reflect their students' backgrounds. Additionally, the emphasis on phonics and foundational skills offers clear guidance for

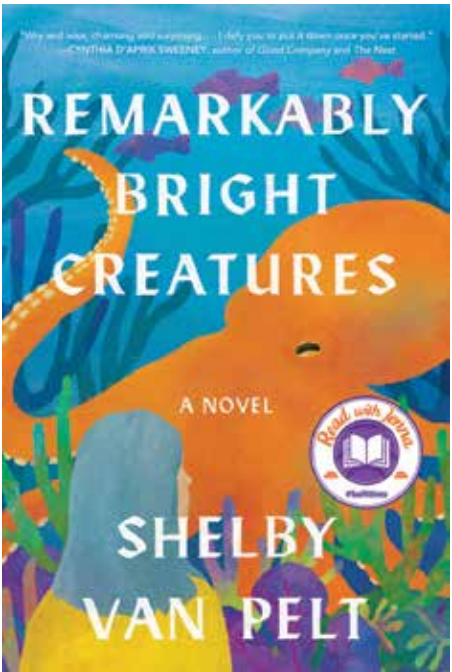
Reviewed By: Erin Thomas

developing literacy in English learners.

What makes this book especially relevant is its adaptability. With tips for remote teaching and workshops, Gonzalez and Miller address the evolving needs of educators in different learning environments.

The authors' extensive experience as educators shines through, offering both inspiration and practical tools. Teachers will appreciate the balance between theory and real-world applications, ensuring they can implement the ideas effectively.

Overall, *Reading and Writing with English Learners* is a great resource for educators passionate about fostering literacy in diverse classrooms. It's both a guide and a reminder of the transformative power of inclusive and thoughtful teaching.



his curmudgeonly yet intelligent demeanor, adds a unique and charming element to the narrative. Their bond is a testament to the healing power of friendship, even when it comes from the most unexpected sources. At first Cameron comes across as unlikeable, spending a great deal of time blaming others for his situation.

REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES

Author: Shelby Van Pelt
Publisher: HarperCollins

Reviewed By: Erin Thomas

Remarkably Bright Creatures is a heartwarming and poignant novel that beautifully explores themes of grief, loss, and the unexpected connections in our lives. As I began to read, the book felt oddly familiar though I knew I hadn't read it before. As I got deeper into the story, I found it to be vaguely reminiscent of the emotional journey I went on while reading *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman.

The story is told from three perspectives; Tova Sullivan, a widow who works nights as a cleaner at the local aquarium; Cameron Cassmore, a young man searching for his place in the world; and Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus.

Tova's character is deeply relatable, as she navigates the pain of losing her husband and son, finding comfort in her routine and the quiet companionship of Marcellus. The octopus, with

Cameron's journey intersects with Tova's, adding another layer of depth to the story. His struggles and growth are portrayed with sensitivity, transforming him into a compelling and integral part of the narrative. The alternating viewpoints allow readers to gain a deeper understanding of each character's inner world and the connections that bind them.

Van Pelt's debut novel is a masterful blend of humor, emotion, and introspection. The writing is evocative, drawing readers into the world of the aquarium and the lives of its inhabitants. It is clear from the narrative that Van Pelt did extensive research into octopus behaviour through both observation of octopus videos and consultation with marine biologists. This only enhances the story's authenticity and depth.

Remarkably Bright Creatures has received praise for its heartwarming story and the complexity of its characters. It is a must-read for anyone who appreciates a story that is both uplifting and deeply moving.



Une Retraitée Passionnée par le Bénévolat : L'Engagement d'une Enseignante

Je suis à la retraite depuis 7 ans et je profite de la liberté que ça m'apporte. Je peux voyager, travailler dans mes jardins, m'entraîner au gym et, surtout passer du temps précieux avec mon petit-fils. La retraite est vraiment un temps de joie, d'équilibre et de relaxation bien méritée.

C'est ma première année au sein du conseil d'administration de la RTAM.

Depuis 5 ans, je suis membre du chapitre des ÉMR (Éducatrices et Educateurs Manitobains à la Retraite).

À la retraite, j'ai trouvé enrichissant de m'impliquer auprès de la RTAM. Ceci me permet de rester en contact avec les personnes partageant les mêmes intérêts, de m'engager dans des activités fructueuses, et de savourer la liberté d'explorer mes passions.



**RETIRED TEACHERS'
ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA**



Jocelyne Fraser
Membre du Conseil et
Membre de la RTAM

***“et de savourer la liberté
d'explorer mes passions”***

Grâce à la RTAM, je reste active dans la communauté, tout en profitant d'occasions d'apprentissage et de croissance personnelle. Je collabore avec des gens qui ont à cœur le bien-être de tous.

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