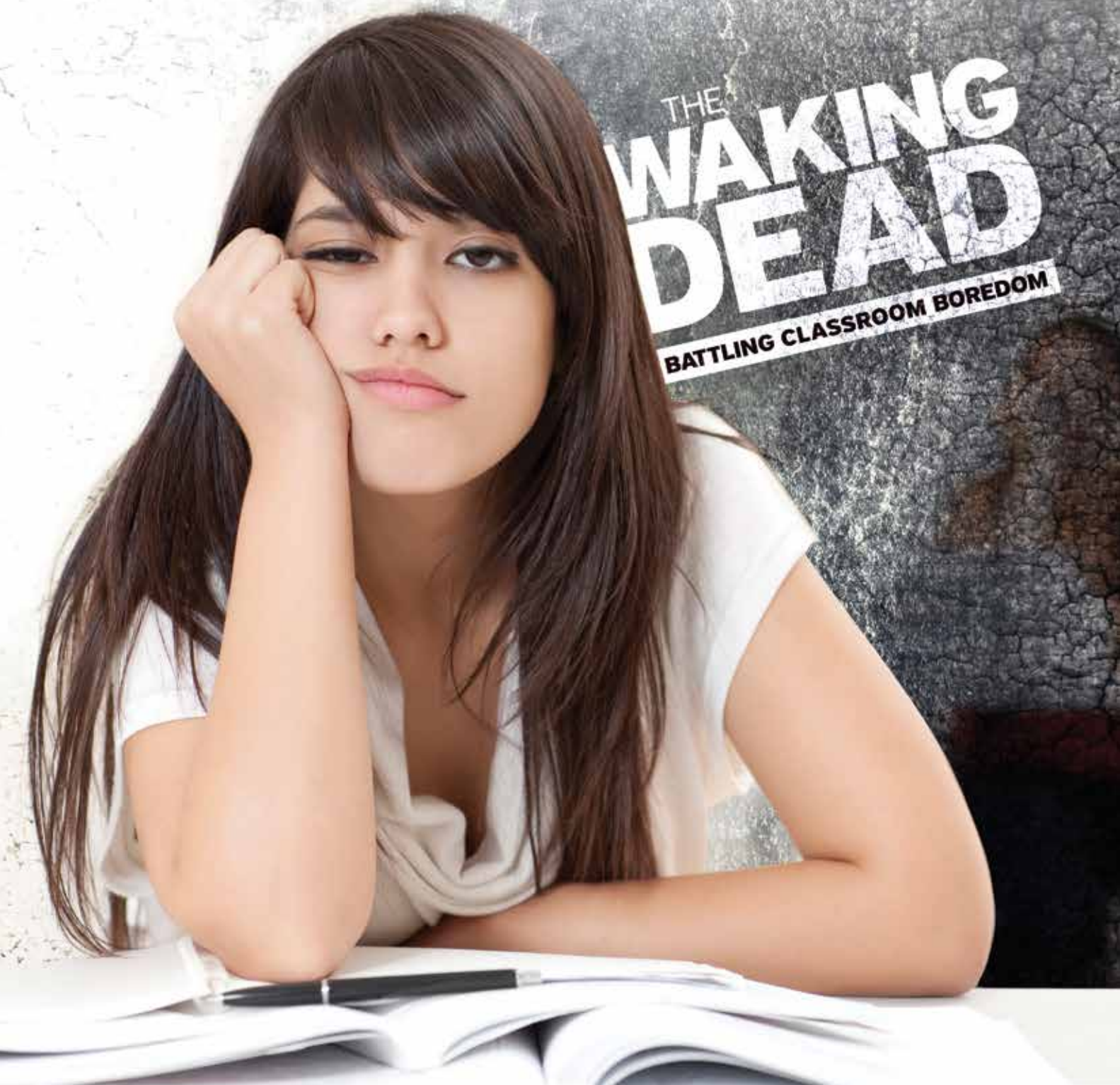


THE MANITOBA Teacher

APRIL/MAY 2013 VOLUME 91 NUMBER 6 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY



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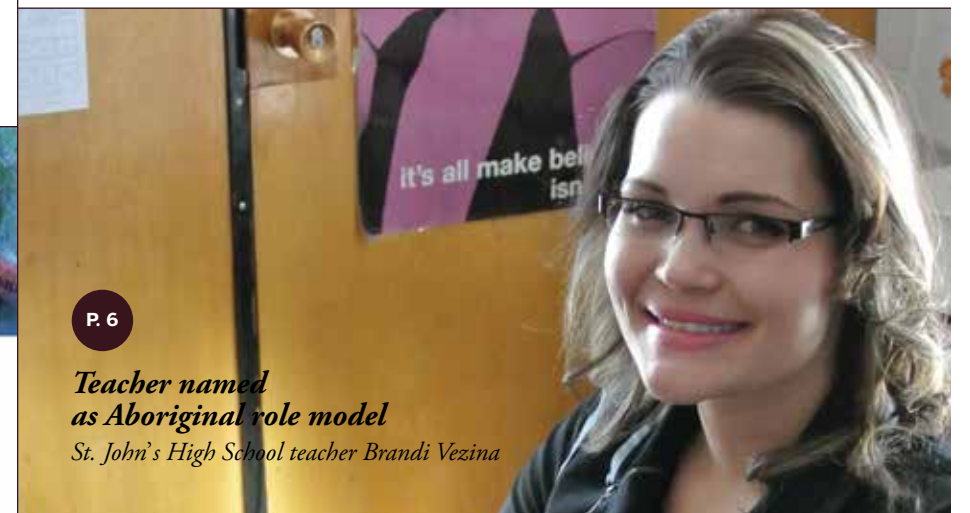
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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

PAUL OLSON

Lists and Stacks

Bill 18 is a proposed amendment to The Public Schools Act regarding bullying. Among other things, it's being framed by some as a direct attack by government on the rights of faith-based schools.

The discussions I've had to date with political leaders, colleagues, and media evince a few recurring themes. The definition of bullying is too vague. The bill encroaches upon religious freedoms. It focusses on one type of bullying more than others. It puts people at risk of frivolous, vindictive accusations.

All legislation must stand up to close scrutiny. It's the duty of the Opposition to question any government initiative, and of broader and interlocking communities to explore and to understand what impact it may have for them. Government must continue to consider the questions and concerns of all, up to and including such time as the bill is considered formally at the Leg. This is a burden of authority.

As citizens, our many responsibilities are not to be viewed as a grocery list. They are not scattered about the floor like so many spilled peanuts to be picked up one by one, in random order, as time and energy permit.

Our obligations are not "piled", in other words. They're "stacked". They exist in a hierarchy. It's the job of teachers, parents, politicians, and even religious leaders to remember this. As parents, my wife and I work to ensure the kids have music lessons and sport opportunities. If it came down to it, though, those would disappear pretty quickly if we were having trouble buying groceries, or paying the mortgage. I have a duty to teach math well, but no one thinks I should prioritize that over a school evacuation in the event of a fire.

There will doubtless be much more said and written about Bill 18. In the midst of all the noise, however, I will offer a simple reminder: Many of our kids are afraid to go to school.

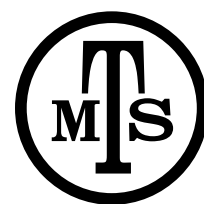
They're also afraid to check their Facebook or text messages. They're afraid to take their boyfriend or girlfriend to grad. They're even afraid to sign up for choir, drama, or teams, because they'll end up going home later, probably alone, and thus be more vulnerable to attack. Credible research is telling us that this applies to the "cool kids" too, because they're wondering when their "turn" to be the target will come. Not all wounds are visible. Neither are all fears.

Kids who are afraid don't sleep well, work well, learn well, or live well. They hide when they should step forward. They isolate when they could join in. Fear undermines their entire lives, not just their report card.

If someone has something in their personal values hierarchy that's more worthy of our focus than "Our Kids are Scared", then I'll look forward to hearing that explained at the Leg.

But they'd better speak slowly and use small words, because I'm pretty sure I'll have a lot of trouble keeping up.

Paul Olson



The
Manitoba
Teachers'
Society

Editor

George Stephenson,
gstephenson@mbteach.org

Send contributions to:

Editor

The Manitoba Teacher

191 Harcourt Street

Winnipeg, MB R3J 3H2

Phone: (204) 831-3058

Fax: (204) 831-0877

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.

The Manitoba Teacher welcomes story ideas and submissions from members. Contact the editor.

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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

KEN PEARCE, GENERAL SECRETARY

At times during the past few years the public has met Manitoba teachers represented by Mrs. Kowalchuk and Mr. Houle. They also got a quick tour of a classroom by a parent.

These were all images in TV advertising that originated with your staff at The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

One desire that has become clear in our polling of members is that you want us to promote public school teachers and teaching and give the public a better idea of what it is you do. Our advertising is a part of that. And a lot of work carries those ads to TV screens.

When considering what a particular advertising campaign should look like, the Public Affairs Facilitator, Judy Edmond, creates ideas based on current issues facing both our schools and our members. She also holds focus groups with parents

to learn about their views of the education their children are getting and their impressions of teachers.

Those ideas are discussed by the Officers of the Society and brought to the Provincial Executive for approval. Attention is given to the overall message or theme and what the public response might be. With the help of an outside agency, scripts are done with care taken to ensure ads are non-partisan, auditions held and TV time booked.

As well, before production, focus groups are often convened to see whether the script's message will get through to the public in proposed commercials.

Once the process is complete, the campaign is launched.

Timing generally depends upon a number of factors but the overall aim is to produce effective, thought-provoking ideas on the value of public education and the role of teachers in our schools. Advertising may

include television, radio and print. It may be part of a larger multi-year campaign that could include everything from mail-outs to bus boards.

Our ads may also tie in with other work we do politically on behalf of members. While MTS is non-partisan, its ads and other efforts may be aimed at persuading the government of the day to undertake certain initiatives (most recently, class size limits).

Our public polling tells us that teachers are very highly regarded by Manitobans. However, after a long day or a difficult conversation with a parent, teachers may not feel that the public understands the vital role of our dedicated teachers in the success of Manitoba students.

We feel the ads are a great service to members and help the general public better understand the role, experiences and work of the average public school teacher.

CMHR proposal heads to AGM

A proposal to spend \$1.5 million on the naming rights for a classroom at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights highlights resolutions going to the MTS Annual General Meeting in May.

The resolution, passed unanimously by the Provincial Executive, calls on the Society to pay for the rights over a five-year period.

Under the plan, which must be approved by AGM delegates, a down payment of \$300,000 would be made with funds coming from the Operation Stabilization Fund. The remaining \$1.2 million would be paid over 60 months with a cost per member of \$1.52 per month.

The impact on the proposed MTS budget for 2013–2014 can be seen on page 17.

The resolution says the museum's objective is to increase understanding and

awareness about human rights issues and challenges and funding from MTS would show the Society's commitment "to the educational purpose and mandate of the CMHR."

The resolution points out that while the museum is a federal government responsibility, "funding for the capital costs of the CMHR comes from private donations as well as from three jurisdictions of government."

MTS, on behalf of Manitoba public school teachers, has already contributed \$62,000 to the project.

The museum is the first national one to be created in Canada since 1967 and the first located outside the National Capital Region.

Other resolutions delegates will debate at the May 23–25 AGM include:

- A call for the province to review policies to "ensure that same-sex families

and LGBTTTQ people and themes are reflected in all curricula."

- Changes suggested to rules for nomination and election of the president and Provincial Executive. One resolution proposes the president be elected by delegates at the AGM, rather than by teachers at large.
 - A series of proposals to cut down the number of meetings of the Provincial Executive and to change the Annual General Meeting to one that is held every two years.
 - A resolution that the Society pay expenses for association presidents or vice-presidents to observe Provincial Executive meetings.
 - That MTS do away with its gala dinner during AGM and devote the time to another business session.
- For more AGM, 2013, material, see page 17.

Caring to teach

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON



When Brandi Vezina was a little Métis girl playing with friends in the tiny hamlet of Stony Point, she always played the role of the teacher.

And when she wasn't doing that, she was berry picking with the family in the jack pine around the community, now known as Patricia Beach, or out on the big lake helping with the fishing.

More than 20 years later she's brought together her two loves—the environment and teaching—to St. John's High School, where she was recently recognized with a national award as an Aboriginal role model.

"It was such a great honour," she said after returning from the Indspire Indigenous Educator Awards presentation in Calgary. "There are so many passionate educators out there."

She's certainly one. There's no lack of passion as she speaks about the role she plays as a teacher and how she views her Grade 7 students and school.

"I have a job to do and that is to make kids' lives better," she says. "Everybody needs somebody who believes in them. I have 87 students and they're awesome. I genuinely love to be a teacher."

It wasn't the first step in her current journey, though.

She first earned an environmental science degree, which resulted in two job offers from oil companies in Alberta. Shocking friends and family, she rejected both and continued to ponder the idea of teaching. She had worked with Career Trek, a program designed to show young kids the nuts and bolts of various careers. That experience was a first step into education, with an eye on helping disadvantaged students.

"I really felt that I could help kids; to teach them to care for themselves,

to value education. I felt the kids needed me and I needed them."

She pauses and considers that might sound somewhat "pompous".

"But it is the way I feel."

Indeed, it just sounds matter-of-fact.

After university, she taught five years at Stanley Knowles School in Winnipeg where she coached sports, formed an after-school Aboriginal group and another group focused on social justice issues. She now sees the workload she put on herself did take its toll.

"I was kind of a bleeding heart and wanted to do a lot of things, but I wasn't taking care of myself," she recalls.

Taking care of oneself became a major part of her own life—she doesn't drink anymore after realizing alcohol was having a negative impact on her life. She carried that thinking over to St. John's, a high school in the heart of Winnipeg's inner city, which she chose because of its "rapport among students and staff and how much staff care about the kids."

That aspect of her teaching was recognized by Indspire, formerly the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation.

"Vezina demonstrates why eating a balanced diet and staying fit complements learning," the group said in announcing the award. "She instructs at-risk youth and adults about the importance of self-care and curriculum."

"If I can teach kids to care for themselves, to care for their own education and to value education, they will care for their community and the earth," she says. "But you have to care to teach them to care about themselves."

Her classroom is wallpapered with tips and ideas on eating better and respecting others and taking care of oneself. Much of her efforts are aimed at helping all kids feel proud of their culture and learn more about their history.

"They have to know, to have a sense of where they came from. I try to help them see that they make their ancestors proud with the decisions they make now. It's about having honour.

"I am extremely proud of my culture. Every day I come to school I pass Louis Riel's grave and I salute him."

At the school, Vezina has started an Honouring Spirit program for students and parents to learn about their culture from a community cultural advisor. The program has attracted both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and there are four parents who come every week. It focuses on love, kindness, the seven teachings (traditional Aboriginal concepts of respect and sharing) and the idea that the kids are on earth for a purpose.

At first blush much of it seems pretty heady, complex stuff for 12-year-olds, but Vezina says they do begin to understand the concepts that end up having an impact on their everyday lives.

Her ideas have carried from the classroom into other realms. She has a website and Facebook page where she posts tips on nutrition, fitness and physical activity and at last count has some 3,500 people checking in on a weekly basis.

She also gives motivational speeches to Aboriginal and Métis communities and organizations. She is a singer-songwriter and performer. At her first school in Pine Falls she helped with the jiggling club. As well, she's been working with the province to create a diabetes prevention video, self-esteem projects and an engagement curriculum.

And she has yet to turn 31.

Next up, she hopes to get more involved with teachers and parents to focus on the themes of self-care and to look more at the environment and sustainability.

It seems a heavy workload and she does admit that sometimes she can lean toward being downbeat.

"You can go through all sorts of emotions, but through faith I always know that something better is on its way."



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Lost Prizes/ICIE Seminars

July 10-13, 2013

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- » Dr. Don Ambrose
- » Dr. John Hoover
- » Dr. Todd Lubart
- » Dr. Steve Van Bockern

and many other international & local speakers!

PBDE Opportunity:

A feature of the Seminars will be conference-connected Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education courses. Interested PBDE students will be able to choose one 3-credit hour course starting before the Seminars and/or another immediately following the event. Each of these courses will involve three days of formal instruction, and then full conference participation to complete the PBDE requirements. Students must be admitted to the PBDE program in order to register for these courses.

Application deadline: June 1, 2013

For further information, please visit:
education.uwinnipeg.ca/graduate_studies/pbde

For more information:

web - lostprizes.uwinnipeg.ca

email - Kari McCluskey at ka.mccluskey@uwinnipeg.ca

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Program **LOST** and **FOUND**

Lost Prizes is a program whose time has come and gone.

And come again.

Administrators in the University of Winnipeg Faculty of Education hope that in its latest incarnation, the program aimed toward helping at-risk kids could become an annual event, attracting delegates from around the world.

Lost Prizes was originally run almost 20 years ago by facilitators in three Manitoba school divisions, Lord Selkirk, Interlake, and Agassiz (now Sunrise). The venture proved highly successful at re-engaging high-ability but marginalized students who had dropped out of school. Other related projects followed until 1999; Northern Lights focused on Aboriginal students, Second Chance with young inmates from First Nations communities and Prism which focused on self-awareness and achievement for troubled youth from various backgrounds.

"We developed the plans as part of our training in creative problem solving," says Dean of the Faculty of Education, Ken McCluskey. "Those were projects through the 1990s. We talked about revisiting classes, but after 2003 we were finished."

Still, word must have travelled about the success of the programs because in 2005, McCluskey and colleague, Alan Wiebe, co-ordinator of mentoring with the faculty, were invited to speak at several international seminars.

Requests to visit the Manitoba-based program centres and receive training began pouring in.

"It was never intended to be a long-term program. Initially Lost Prizes was developed as a pedagogical tool, as an intervention strategy," says McCluskey.

"It was a bit of an embarrassment. People wanted to see what we were doing here but it didn't exist so we had to reactivate things. Alan developed the Transition Program at the Youth Centre and picked up the mentoring. We've gone back to the divisions Lord Selkirk, Sunrise, and others and now have programs that people can actually see. After a few of these international things took

off in places like England, Germany to name a few, we realized we were on the cusp of something really good."

Under the Lost Prizes umbrella, several members of the U of W's Faculty of Education continue to develop principles and strategies to guide training, programming and research locally and abroad. They are spearheading projects in Thailand, Jordan, India and Mexico with training and support provided at "cost", covering only essentials such as travel, accommodations, food and materials.

The joint Lost Prizes / ICIE conference being held July 10 to 13 arose in part from the realization that they couldn't give everyone everything they needed.

"We want people to be exposed to other networks and then be able to follow up with their seminars and events as well. Lost Prizes was at the outset a narrow-focus program but has now become more of a philosophy and an attitude.

"I think one of the biggest challenges in education today is that there are a lot of very difficult kids and societal problems in classes as a matter of course and people have a tendency not to be prepared to deal with that. There are a lot of very good things we don't want to do away with; skills you want in subject areas to teach reading, or math or science or whatever, but if you can't manage kids it's almost all for naught. There are so many kids out there who bite the hands that didn't feed them and they're coming to us from very unfortunate and difficult circumstance and backgrounds. Our reality of what constitutes proper education is not the reality of their lives."

There's no way of really knowing what the conference attendance will be, though organizers anticipate enrollment will be about 300, including more than 25 from Europe and another contingent from Africa.

"We have gone out to speak with the superintendents about this and we think the pick-up is going to be significant."

Full details of specific times, speakers and registration fees are available online at lostprizes.uwinnipeg.ca.

i am so

bored

BY PAT ST. GERMAIN

teaching the same subject for 27 years might be a Sisyphean task, but Miro Gawinski has learned to roll with it.

The Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School design drafting teacher found a way to banish his

own boredom as soon as it reared its ugly head.

"If I look back on my career, the first year in the classroom was exciting. The second year it was exciting, but maybe a little less. By the third year I was in that state of mind where, 'Oh my goodness, do I have to do this again?' And you begin to make changes for your own sanity," Gawinski says.

The changes he made actually improved the course material. And in the past 25 years, Gawinski says he hasn't taught his class the same way twice.

"I've taught the same concepts and theories and ideas, but not through the same exercises—not the same way—and it's just survival," he says.

"You don't necessarily have to use the same exercise to illustrate a principle, so you come up with more creative exercises. You come up with more creative little projects for them to do to learn a particular concept or theory. And those changes are essential for your own sanity, but as I say, are absolutely terrific in improving the course material and making education more interesting for the students."

York University associate professor of psychology John Eastwood says confronting boredom head-on is the best approach.

"I think that the thing to do when bored is to take the feeling or the experience seriously—to pause and try to reflect on what this tells you," he says.

"If a teacher is bored, it's pretty likely their students are going to be bored, too. Because that would mean the teacher is really not emotionally engaged or invested in what's happening."

He says teachers who are bored should ask themselves the same questions they'd ask students: Is there something difficult about their situation that they're mislabeling as boring? Are they afraid of failing at it? Do they need to figure out what makes the task meaningful and important to them?

"I don't think boredom is inherently bad or good—it's more about how we respond to it or what we do about it," he says.

"Rather than try to run away from it, use it as a learning opportunity. Curiosity and passionate engagement is the opposite of boredom, so get curious about boredom and I think you'll find your way out the other side."

Passionate engagement is a given for Gawinski. He thinks of his job as a partnership with his students. They motivate him and keep him on his toes, and he returns the favour.

"Keeping them interested is part of the game," he says. "As long as I can make it interesting for myself—and challenging for myself—then I have a better chance of bringing them along on that ride."

wanting, but unable to engage in a satisfying activity

every day, millions of school kids suffer in slack-jawed silence from the same excruciating affliction—boredom.

We've all been there, but boredom isn't always a trivial complaint. Academic studies have associated it with stress, increased dropout rates and delinquency. At minimum it speaks to a lack of attention that's not conducive to learning.

Two out of three students who took part in a 2007 Indiana University survey of high schools in 26 states said they were bored every day. And it's possible that our modern, plugged-in society is making kids and adults more vulnerable to boredom.

York University associate professor of psychology John Eastwood says responding to boredom is important, but it's too easy to simply avoid it when we have so many electronic options for instant stimulation at hand.

"One of the things that we're starting to look at in our lab is this question of the fact that we can so easily pick up and play a game on our phone—and that we often do that. Does that actually make us more ripe for boredom, not only less capable of coping with it when it occurs?"

Eastwood developed an interest in boredom through his work as a clinical and cognitive psychologist. He found that chronically depressed people often struggled with boredom, and some even cited it as personal a risk factor.

"When they felt bored they became anxious and worried that a depressive episode might be coming down the road," he says. "I thought, 'Well, is boredom different from depression, or are they overlapping or are they the same thing or how would we distinguish them?'"

Considering boredom is such a common condition, academic research was relatively scarce, but Eastwood and his colleagues are making headway.

In a paper published in *Perspectives in Psychological Science*, they define boredom as "wanting, but being unable to engage in a satisfying activity."

Eastwood says all episodes of boredom involve a failure of our attention systems. When we can't focus our attention, we're likely to be bored—and we tend to blame the subject or activity at hand.

He cites a scenario in which three people are given the same book to read in three separate rooms. One reader is left in perfect silence, one is bombarded by noise, and one is subjected to faint subliminal noise. Afterward, the first reader says the book was interesting, the second says he was too distracted to pay attention to it, and the reader subjected to subliminal noise says the book was boring.

"They don't attribute their failure to engage the text with the noise—they attribute it to something inherent in the text," he says.

Noise isn't necessarily auditory. A silenced iPhone and an itchy texting finger, stress or a chaotic domestic situation can all be low-level distractions. And urban environments are hotbeds of noise.

"There's this whole body of research—it's relatively small, but fairly well developed—showing the positive effects of being in a natural environment on our attention system."

Nature engages our attention in a gentle way, while artificial environments overwhelm us with stimulation. We're constantly plugged in, which can leave us fatigued and desensitize us to subtle forms of stimulation.

Eastwood speculates unplugging and putting more focus on nurturing imagination and engaging in unstructured play would be helpful for kids. They can play with a stick or a ball in any number of ways, but a computer game requires less imagination because it can only be played one way.

"We're in an environment where usually our attention is grabbed by very salient, exciting, demanding information, like loud music or engaging video games and that kind of thing," he says.

"And I think we're losing the capacity to... reach out and connect with the world in ways that require more effort—more sustained attention—on our part."

Researchers say students are more likely to claim they're bored in classes that require mental exertion. Math and science tend to be more snooze-inducing than shop class and students say they're bored in classes that are heavy on lecturing and light on hands-on activity and discussion.

But boredom may be a convenient label. In some cases, students may just need reassurance that they're up to a difficult task.

"It could be that they're just trying to come up with a way of not confronting the fact that they're struggling with this and

perhaps failing," Eastwood says. "So they can say, 'Well I could do it if it wasn't so boring, but it's so boring so I'm not going to try.'"

Eastwood says students also find it difficult to focus attention on subjects they don't see as meaningful or relevant to their lives.

A study of German Grade 11 students found they were bored during math class 52% of the time, but their boredom was alleviated when they confronted it and examined the cause. And teachers can use a discussion of boredom to explore ways to promote a deeper level of engagement.

For example, a student who understands that she has to pass a math class to achieve her goal of going to university to become a librarian may be more motivated to apply herself.

"You work backwards and fit it into a broader, meaningful context," Eastwood says. "That can sometimes help people engage with whatever it is they're doing."



Waiting for fairness (and Godot)

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

Now that Bill C-377, one of the Harper government's premier flowers in its anti-union garden, is about to bloom, it's time to get to work on expanding that law.

It's apparent that the Conservatives overlooked some obvious areas in which to apply the deep thinking that went into drafting this legislation. Like the cliché goes, it's a good start, but more work needs to be done.

As it stands, Bill C-377 amends the Income Tax Act to make it mandatory for unions and labour organizations to publicly disclose a wide swath of their expenditures.

They would have to publicly disclose such things as salaries, expenditures on lobbying and, well, pretty much everything. Apparently union members are not smart enough to actually ask how their money is spent.

But, really, it has nothing to do with members of unions.

It orders unions to make public: statements on any expenditure over \$5,000 and who got paid, statements of accounts

receivable, statements of loans over \$250, statements of disbursements, including salaries and benefits, to individuals over \$100,000, statements of time spent on "political" or "lobbying" activities and on and on and on.

This is all being done by amending the Income Tax Act because unions are constitutionally regulated by the provinces. In other words, the tax act is the only place the federal government can put down its boot heel.

At least that's the uncharitable view.

The sponsor of the bill, Vancouver Tory MP Russ Hiebert, says it is all aimed at making unions more transparent and accountable. And the connection with the Income Tax Act? Well, union dues are tax deductible, therefore what they spend every dime on should be publicly available to everyone.

That is an excellent point. And since this is now the apparent belief of the Conservative government, then it should begin to immediately expand the law to include everyone and every organization that falls within that description.

It was no doubt an oversight on behalf of the government that the law singled out unions to be enveloped with Harper's unending concern about transparency.

Now it will just have to fill in a few of the cracks that have been opened by the legislation.

No doubt the public should be able to see what Law Societies and Bar Associations and doctors' organizations do with their membership fees. Members of all those organizations pay dues that are tax deductible.

Actually, pretty well any business should have to file the same statements since all businesses have tax deductions of some sort or the other and more tax breaks were added in last month's federal budget. We need that kind of transparency since their tax deductions, like union dues, are indirectly taking money away from taxpayers.

Close to home, shouldn't everyone in Manitoba know how True North, owner of the Winnipeg Jets, spends every dime?

More than any union, it actually gets direct funnel from the public trough. It's not even

clear how much the organization gets every year, but it is somewhere around \$11 million.

It doesn't have to pay business taxes. It keeps 10 per cent of the amusement tax charged on tickets, pays a fraction of its property tax bill and will rake in millions from the new gambling joint the province has approved next door to the arena.

Well, how much does everybody at True North get in compensation? What do they spend more than \$5,000 on every year and who gets the money? How much of their time goes into "political" activities. Inquiring minds, like Russ Hiebert's, no doubt want to know.

And what about the other deadbeats that get taxpayers' cash, like the oil industry?

According to the David Suzuki Foundation the federal government alone gives out more than \$1.4 billion in tax subsidies to the oil, coal and gas companies. Again, it must have been an inadvertent oversight that they were not included in Bill C-377.

The legislation has been loudly cheered by those on the right, especially by people like the writers for Sun Media, owners of the Sun chain of newspapers and TV network.

Good for them. We can hardly wait to see how much money and time Sun Media, and its owner Quebecor, spends on political activities and lobbying.

Quebecor has never been shy about taking taxpayers' money. Its magazines have benefited from the Canadian Periodical Fund. Benefited, as in being subsidized by more than \$3 million. An analysis by CBC (in response to attacks from Sun Media on the public corporation) has shown that Quebecor has received about \$500 million in various tax breaks and subsidies for all of its media properties.

Quebecor has disputed those figures, while at the same time admitting it has soaked up a couple of tax dollars here and there, such as \$21 million from a federal television fund. So, there, it was only a little bit pregnant.

While the exact amount Quebecor has been stuffing into its bank accounts appears to be in dispute it should be clear soon; once its media properties voice strong support for transparency among all organizations that get tax breaks.

Now that the union part of the legislation is in place, Sun Media columnists will most likely be calling on corporations and law societies and chambers of commerce and conservative think tanks and employers' organizations to be included in the law.

Actually, they shouldn't stop there. Everyone who gets a tax break from any government should have to tell everybody else what they spend their money on.

You took a tax deduction for your kid's hockey registration or dance fees? Let me see all your financial statements.

You deducted a charitable donation? Tell us how much you paid for your car.

You took a tax deduction for donating to MP Russ Hiebert's election campaign? Show us your last IQ test.

Benefit plans up in service, down in cost

More and more local associations are joining MTS benefits programs, helping to reduce costs and increase services.

Those are the findings of a review of programs over the past several years, preceding another expected reduction in Disability Benefits Plan premiums and a proposal for the Society to create its own short-term disability plan.

Glen Anderson, MTS staff officer responsible for group benefits, says collective growth in the plans the past three years has helped to decrease premiums paid by members.

Since the 1970s, MTS has entered into a number of insurance programs and now is involved in five—Group life, long-term disability, short-term disability, extended health and dental—that local associations can join.

All five have shown a wide-range of positive changes over the years.

Disability Benefits Plan

With an expected decrease in premiums for next year (yet to be approved by the MTS Annual General Meeting in May), the yearly cost to members will be approaching the lowest in the plan's history. The fee being proposed is 1.33 per cent of salary, down from 1.62 per cent. Other enhancements over the past few years have included:

- Automatic waiver of premiums for members on disability.
- Increased focus on claims prevention and rehabilitation.

Extended Health

The biggest change for the extended health program in 2013 will mean a major savings for members, says Anderson. All members of associations in the plan will see about a 40-per-cent saving as the plan moves to a pre-tax premium in September. Other changes seen include:

- Decreasing premiums for the past three years while increasing coverage in the past two years.
- Coverage increased on the dispensing fee cap to \$7 per prescription and an increase to \$850 per person per year on all paramedical services.
- Hearing aids increased to \$1,000 once every three years.
- Increase in eye exams to \$75 once every two years.

Short Term Disability

The short-term disability plan has grown from involvement of nine associations to 15 in the past four years and now MTS is proposing to create its own program. The plan has been operated through a private insurer. The new plan, which needs approval at the May AGM, would be administered by the Society's Disability Benefits Plan. The proposed plan will have enhanced benefits, pay no taxes, and be available at no additional cost.

Dental

In the past two years most associations reached a mature plan status, resulting in a surplus that has been used to either decrease premiums or institute coverage increases. One increase was the addition last year of dental implants to covered services.

Group Life

A major change was the increase in 2010 of available coverage to seven times salary from five times salary, while maintaining premiums at 10 cents per thousand since the 1990s. Other changes included automatic waivers for members on disability and allowing members to increase insurance 90 days before the birth of a first child.

Anderson and Ralph Ramore, the Disability Benefits Plan administrator, say there are a couple of major reasons the plans overall have seen both increases in services and reductions in benefits.

One is that as more associations join, numbers of members grow and services can be enhanced.

"It's the benefit of being a union and being part of a collective," says Ramore.

Anderson adds that "the focus is on member service as opposed to boards of insurance companies focusing on creating a dividend to the shareholder or policy holder."



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Students outside the nearly finished early-years school in November 2012

Pencils and paper become walls and roof

BY MIREILLE THERIAULT

In July of 2010 Deborah Barry went to Ghana with Project Overseas through the Canadian Teachers' Federation for the first time.

With \$600 she had raised through donations from the Louis Riel Teachers' Association and the division school board she bought supplies for three schools, but soon realized the village of Bokorvikofe needed more than what goes in the school.

It needed a whole new school.

The K-to-Grade 3 school was a crude shelter with a thatched roof. With no walls or floor, there was no real protection from the elements for the children.

"When I came back to Hastings School, I really wanted it to be something that was sustainable," says Barry. "I contacted the CTF and asked what it would cost to build a school." The exact figure kept changing but it was in the range of \$5,000. With that number in mind, fundraising began.

"We did quite a few different types of fundraising but we also tried to make it relevant and beneficial for our own kids and community. The students had a real appreciation for what they had and what life was like somewhere else. They jumped in whole heartedly. We discussed what sustainable development meant and they learned that they could do something."

Bit by bit, from September to June, activities brought in \$700 or \$300 at a time. Larger amounts like a \$1,000 social justice grant came from the Manitoba Association of Computing Educators, \$1,000 from the St. Mary's Road United Church and another \$1,200 from the LRTA brought the final total to \$6,500.

"This was a big thing for the CTF. This was their first school building project and so to make sure it was successful and could happen again in the future, they ensured all money was going where it needed to go and was accounted for," says Barry. But when everything was accounted for, it was clear it would actually cost \$10,500 to build the school.

Her contact at the CTF was a member of the Ottawa South Rotary Club, a group that had raised \$4,000 towards the same goal.

"They didn't have enough either but by pooling the money we were able to move forward."

On her second journey with CTF in 2011, she was lucky enough to be part of a ground-breaking ceremony for the project.

Work began on the school in March of 2012.

"The villagers hired a foreman and a few experts but they made all their own bricks and literally built the school themselves," says Barry.

On February 26, 2013 the school was officially opened and a plaque unveiled that recognizes the work of Barry, her teachers' organizations and her students.

The early childhood education centre now has about 100 students, both boys and girls, and serves as a hub for neighboring villages.

Aside from increasing the number of days children could attend school with proper shelter, Barry points out it was instrumental in attracting and retaining qualified teachers. In 2009, there were three teachers in Bokorvikofe, and no proper schools. Now there are 15 (all but four are trained) for students from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

Barry was transferred to Darwin School after her second trip to Ghana, but returned to Hastings to make a presentation about the opening ceremony of the school in Bokorvikofe.

"I had bracelets with each students' name made for them in thanks. I also brought back a wooden relief called 'A Helping Hand'. It's of a boy climbing a palm tree, trying to reach a coconut and someone pushing him from behind. It's in the office at Hastings School along with the picture of the opening ceremonies as a reminder that all people need to do is give a hand and anything is possible."

AIDS IN AFRICA SOLIDARITY TOUR COMES TO MTS

The Stephen Lewis Foundation Solidarity Tour, raising awareness of AIDS in Africa, comes to Manitoba in May, sponsored by The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

The MTS provincial executive contributed \$2,500 to the tour and another \$2,000 to help hold the Manitoba event at the Society building on May 4.

MTS is inviting members and the general public interested in hearing activists from Africa. Those interested should contact Manto Caldis at mcaldis@mbteach.org or 204-888-7961. Seating is limited.

The Solidarity Tour features three speakers:

- Wairimu Mungai, Director, WEM Integrated Health Services in Kenya. WEM implements community-based programs that improve the capacity of vulnerable community groups to better cope with the impacts of disease and poverty.

- Netty Musanhu, Executive Director of Musasa in Zimbabwe. Musasa is a community-based organization that implements gender-based anti-violence programs.

- Nathan Nhlane, National Coordinator of the Zambia National Antiretroviral Support Programme (ZNARVS). ZNARVS works to promote access to psychosocial, treatment, human rights and nutrition support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Solidarity Tour is being organized with the aid of various unions.

Canadian unions have long supported the Stephen Lewis Foundation with a shared commitment to social justice, women's equality, and international solidarity.

In recognition of those shared values, the Foundation organized the Solidarity Tour for union members from Winnipeg to Windsor—a 15-day trip to raise awareness and understanding about the AIDS pandemic in Africa.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation works with grassroots organizations turning the tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Since 2003 it has funded over 700 initiatives, partnering with over 300 community-based organizations in 15 countries.

Stephen Lewis' work with the United Nations has spanned more than two decades. He was the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa from June 2001 until the end of 2006. From 1995 to 1999, he was deputy executive director of UNICEF. From 1984 through 1988, he was Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations.

For more information, visit the tour website at www.solidaritytour.ca or the foundation website, www.stephenlewisfoundation.org.

The event in Winnipeg will be held at the MTS main building (McMaster House), 191 Harcourt Street, from 2 pm to 4:30 pm, Saturday, May 4.

Six candidates nominated for MTS Provincial Executive

So far, only six candidates have been nominated for six openings on the MTS Provincial Executive.

And one candidate came forward for the vice-president position during the first nomination period.

Any further candidates will have to be nominated from the floor of the Annual General Meeting in May.



The candidate for one two-year term as vice-president is:

Norm Gould
St. James-Assiniboia

Candidates for the six two-year positions on provincial executive are:



Mary Chalmers
Border Land



Suzanne Jolicoeur
AEFM



Bob Kriski
Portage la Prairie



Mike Mann
Seven Oaks



Bea Walker
Flin Flon



Harry Wiebe
Turtle River

The candidates' biographies and election statements can be found on the MTS website, www.mbteach.org

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- Increase the knowledge and understanding of the Treaties and the Treaty Relationship among all students;
- Ensure students understand the impact of the Treaties and the Treaty Relationship on the creation of Manitoba;
- Build bridges between all peoples in order to strengthen our society and our prosperity.

For training opportunities visit
www.trcm.ca/treaty-education-initiative/

Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba
400-175 Hargrave Street • Winnipeg, Manitoba
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Toll-Free: 1-866-296-3228

Budget proposes 5% fee hike

The 2013–2014 proposed budget for MTS recommends a fee increase of five per cent.

If approved at the May Annual General Meeting, the membership fee would increase to \$877 from \$835, or \$42 a year.

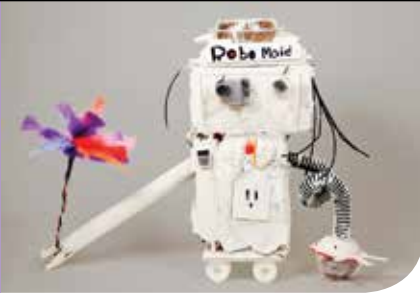
Even if adopted, the fee would still be less than it was three years ago when it topped \$900.

Among the largest expenditures are an annual payment for a donation and classroom naming rights at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, more money for a communications program to profile teaching and teachers and annualized cost of a new membership database.

Expenditures and revenues in the final budget could go up or down depending on decisions made at AGM on a number of resolutions that include other cost implications.



Art PD for Teachers



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Math Recovery

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9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Norwood Hotel, 112 Marion St.



Jim Martland is the co-author of several books on early numeracy and the director of the Mathematics Recovery Program in England, Scotland and Wales. He is Senior

Fellow in the Department of Education at the University of Liverpool.



Gay Sul is a math consultant in Frontier School Division and the only accredited Math Recovery trainer in Canada. In 2009 she was voted Math Teacher of the Year by the Manitoba Association of Math Teachers.

Math Recovery helps struggling learners as well as average and able learners. Come prepared to learn how to conduct, code, and analyze a diagnostic interview, use a research-based continuum, create a teaching plan for individuals or small groups, and use easily made teaching resources.

For further information, e-mail gaysul@mts.net or phone 772-9222.

Food drive brings in 11,871 kg

There were smiles all around March 19 as the non-perishable harvest from 69 Manitoba schools that participated in the 14th Annual Operation Donation School Food Drive was revealed—26,173.2 lbs. (11,871 kg).

Cameron Tramley, who took to the podium with Kateesha Wai, a fellow student at École Varennes, said, 'I feel good about helping the people who don't have as much as we do—most of all the kids.'

The schools' haul, combined with 13,103 lbs. (5,943 kg) of food gathered from Manitoba Public Insurance offices, made a total of 39,276.15 lbs. (17,815 kg).

But it didn't end there.

With Peak of the Market and Canada Safeway matching the school and MPI donations, the total collected was 117,828.45 pounds (53,446 kg).

"Students and teachers are the heart of today's success," said Paul Olson, president of The Manitoba Teachers' Society, a sponsor of the drive. "We celebrate every individual—and every school community—that fought against hunger and hopelessness with love and action."

"Having enough to eat should be the most basic of human rights. Sadly, it's not. We are grateful to every school that participated in Operation Donation. You made it possible for thousands of kids and their parents to get the food they need."

From February 25 to March 1, K-12 schools from across Manitoba helped Winnipeg Harvest by collecting non-perishable food items, including, baby food, tuna, soup, canned vegetables, fruit and pasta, and much more.

The annual campaign always fills a gap at just the right time—after Christmas and before spring planting, when food stocks are low.

Union leader recalls Grade 9 teacher

BY JUDY OWEN

Michelle Gawronsky knows what it's like to be the new kid in class—and it's not fun. When her family moved to Alberta from Thompson, Manitoba, after Grade 5 for employment reasons, she lived in a number of different towns before returning to Manitoba and Roseau River, where her dad followed his dream of mixed farming.

It was near the end of Grade 9 when she first stepped inside the Shevchenko School in Vita and began the difficult task of settling in and making new friends.

Lucky for her, teacher William Siwak made that transition a lot easier.

"Needless to say, when you move from school to school to school it was really hard to make friends," said Gawronsky, the new president of the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union.

"I came into school with a chip on my shoulder and I remember (Siwak) saying, 'You know what St. Godard (her maiden name), I'm here to teach you, you're here to decide whether you want to learn or not...'

"You were accepted when you came into his class. He never treated us like children when we were in senior high."

"He said, 'I'm getting paid today. Whether you learn or not, that's up to you, but I am going to teach and I am a good teacher.' And he was, he was a phenomenal teacher."

Siwak taught her typing and accounting through Grade 11 and then she quit school because she thought she didn't need it, missed some friends in Alberta and "of course, there was a guy in the picture" she wanted to go back and see.

However, she first worked for a year in Vita and happened to meet her late husband, Roman. She ended up staying in the town as they raised four children and Roman was a farm manager.

While working as a health-care aide at a Vita nursing home, Gawronsky met



Siwak's wife, Shirley, who was a secretary, and they became good friends.

She remembers going to the Siwak home for the first time as an adult. She was nervous, but her former teacher—he also taught her two sons and two daughters before retiring—was welcoming.

"He said, 'You've done well, you should be proud of yourself,'" she said, noting she still lives in Vita and they talk to each other about once a month.

She also recalled now-retired teacher Mary-Ann Derewianchuk, who helped her youngest son.

"I could never, ever, ever repay her for what she gave to my son," she said.

That's why the former 4-H leader and school volunteer has the "utmost respect" for teachers.

"I could never do it myself," Gawronsky said. "I don't know where they get their patience from. They must be saints."

"I had four children and there were days when I thought I was going to lose my mind. Imagine sitting in a classroom with 30 children?"

"I find it sad that we're actually sitting in classrooms that are that large. My hat's off to any teacher in Manitoba who puts that time and effort in. And I don't know any teachers that don't put the extra time in."



The Manitoba Teachers' Society



MTS Annual Golf Tournament

Saturday, June 15, 2013

(1 p.m. Shotgun Start)

at the Meadows at East St. Paul Golf Course, Manitoba

Presented by the River East Transcona Teachers' Association

- \$85/golfer – includes 18 holes, 1/2 golf cart, dinner **or**
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Entry deadline is May 30, 2013

Mail entries to:

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Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2K 4B8

Make cheques payable to:
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For more information contact:

Frank Reeves
204-661-1823
freeves@retta.ca

PORTFOLIO

Who would have thought?

U.S. teen birth rates have dropped to a record low in the past 20 years as use of contraceptives among teens has increased.

According to new data from the National Center for Health Statistics teen birth rates have dropped 50 percent since 1991. There was only a slight decline in the number of teens having sex, suggesting that more adolescents are preventing pregnancy by practicing safer sex.

OK, anyone have any better ideas?

The school board in Windsor is also sorry after some teachers thought it a great prank to tell their eighth graders they would be taking a end-of-year trip to Disney World.

The teachers went so far as to make up fake permission slips and a PowerPoint show on the bogus journey.

Eventually came the punch line: They would actually be going to a bowling alley in Windsor.

Ha, ha, ha.

"We were all angry," Grade 8 student Mona Makai told CTV Windsor, adding that the she feels the students were made to feel foolish to the rest of the school. A board spokesperson called it poor judgment.

The teachers themselves have not spoken to the media about the fake out, but one of them has apparently taken responsibility and apologized to the student.

Let all bitterness and wrath... be put away Ephesians 4:31-32

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

From some of the screeching being heard across Manitoba, one might think that the province's Bill 18 forces people to toss puppies and kittens from high bridges—or Christians to the lions.

Not quite. Bill 18 contains the rage-making, but far from radical, new measures that school boards must adopt to ensure students in their care are not bullied.

The whirling Dervishes kicking up a dust storm are some faith-based schools which claim that the law will infringe on their religious freedom and contradict their beliefs and values.

There has been a lot of tap dancing around what that is supposed to mean, but what's left after all the steam and heat is cleared is that these schools don't actually want to acknowledge that gay students exist.

The new law would force them to.

It says that school boards "must accommodate pupils who want to establish and lead activities and organizations that:

- a) promote
 - i) gender equity,
 - ii) antiracism,
 - iii) the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people who are disabled by barriers, or
 - iv) the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities; and
- b) use the name "gay-straight alliance" or any other name that is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils."

There have been peripheral complaints about other parts of the Bill, but (iv) and (b) are really the flint and striker that sparked the firestorm.

Those opposed don't like the idea that students are given the right to establish gay-straight alliances. They quiver at the sight of the words sexual orientation. Yet, in media coverage they never come right out and say what the problem is.

An excellent CBC report on the issue got only this from the principal of a faith-based school: "Independent schools should have the right to direct and ensure any organi-

zations meeting in their school will not be contradictory to their faith principles."

And this from a student opposed to the law: "Sixty years ago, being gay was a mental disease. We've come a long way from calling them mentally unstable but at the same time it's not what the faith base of this school is."

And this from a website calling on people to send form letters of opposition to the government: "Bill 18 requires schools to accommodate and promote student groups that have values and beliefs in direct contradiction to many faith-based independent schools and in contradiction to the communities many public schools are located."

The website is especially laughable in that it contains no examples of how this law contradicts anything. It just lists generalities it declares as facts and has links where people can send form letters of protest. The provincial Conservatives are loving it, claiming more than 5,500 emails have been sent in opposition.

So what?

Given the fact-free nature of the opposition, they might as well say Bill 18 is also a danger to puppies and kittens.

But, who's kidding who? The opposition is clearly among those who would rather see gay students keep themselves, with the help of the school, locked in the closet. They would rather gay students went unacknowledged, ignored, marginalized. Ironically, that in itself could be seen as bullying or at least tacit approval to treat

gays as abnormal; certainly not as mentally ill anymore (thanks, kid), just socially unacceptable. Kind of like lepers of old, deserving of equal measures of compassion and disdain.

It appears to be anyone's guess what beliefs these schools harbour that are so egregiously contradicted by protecting minority students. One spokesperson for religious schooling said on CBC that it's not the students themselves (which he conceded are "human beings"), but the "behaviour" that's the issue.

For those in the slower class, he means sex.

So that's the big issue? Sex between members of the same gender? Good grief, they're teenagers and pre-teens. Their sexual orientation is not a behaviour any more than being straight is a behaviour; it is part of their identity. Maybe some are having sex, maybe they will someday, maybe never. But they will always be gay. And other kids will always be straight.

And as such, they do need protection, along with every other student, from bullying.

And all schools, whether they like it or not, have to do some things that they may not agree with because society at large pays the freight and sets certain standards.

Certain schools may not believe in evolution, but it is taught alongside creationism, whether it seems contradictory or not.

It has not led to the collapse of civilization or anyone's core beliefs and basic protections for gay students won't either.

History 101

A school in the York region of Ontario has put an end to a trend by students sporting depictions of the flag of the U.S. confederacy.

The Confederate flag became popular at Sutton District High School in the last two years, principal Dawn Laliberté told the *Toronto Star*, emblazoned on bandanas, lighters, belt buckles, backpacks and pickup truck windows.

"Our first step is always to educate. We are only dealing with a handful of students who view it as a white pride kind of thing, so we thought now is the time to get the message out," Laliberté said.

"It's more about the country values, we don't think of it as racist," said a Grade 10 student, who has T-shirts, belt buckles and hats with the symbol, and plans to keep wearing them despite the ban.

"I didn't even know it was racist," said a Grade 12 student. "Then I Googled it."

The president of the Ontario Black History Society told *The Star* the fact people are embracing the symbol "shows that not only is there a lack of black history awareness, but there is also a lack of regular history awareness."

Students in North Dakota were disciplined after wearing Ku Klux Klan-style white robes and hoods to a school hockey game.

There was an uproar on Twitter after a picture of the trio was posted by a 19-year-old student who was at the game.

"I thought, 'Are those KKK hoods?' I couldn't believe it," the student said. "I was shocked."

The school principal said an investigation determined the students wore the Klan outfits for about 30 seconds to a minute. The teens removed the outfits after students in the section told them it was offensive, he said.

A New York school has apologized after discovery of a math quiz involving slavery.

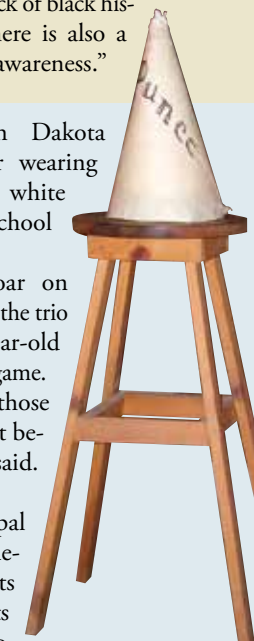
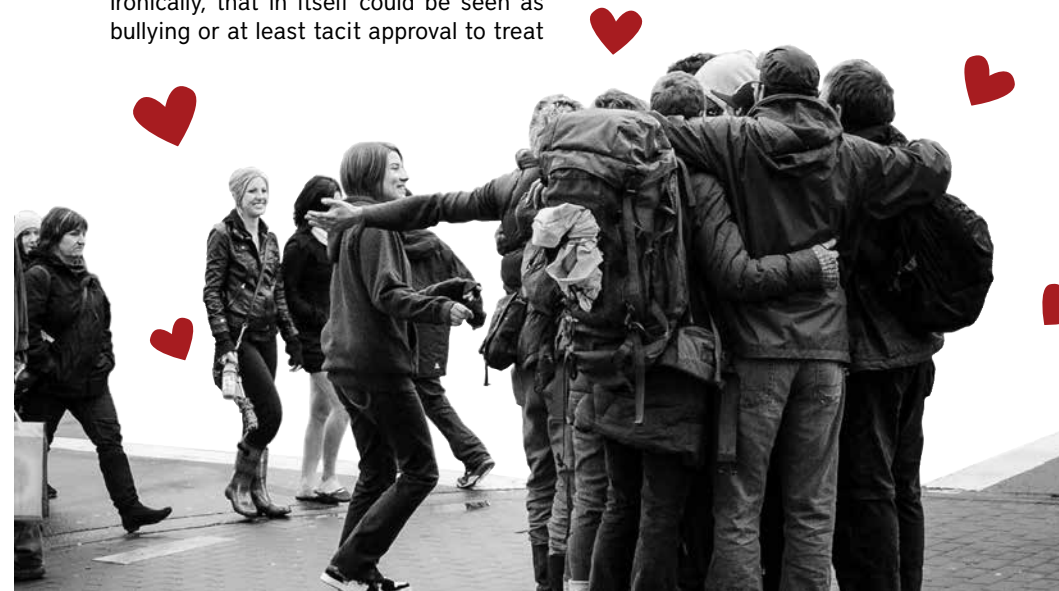
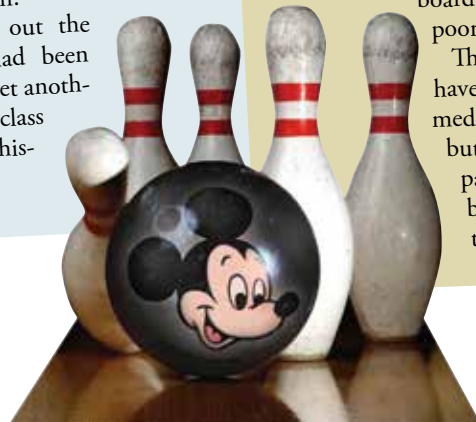
The worksheet entitled "Slavery Word Problems Homework", included questions such as:

"In a slave ship, there can be 3,799 slaves. One day, the slaves took over the ship. 1,897 are dead. How many slaves are alive?"

And:

"One slave got whipped five times a day. How many times did he get whipped in a month (31 days)? Another slave got whipped nine times a day. How many times did he get whipped in a month? How many times did the two slaves get whipped together in one month?"

It turned out the questions had been written by yet another Grade 4 class as part of a history lesson.





LEARNING NOT TO BE STUPID 101

BY MIREILLE THERIAULT

Despite the growing number of articles warning would-be teachers to watch their digital steps, many are not getting the message that their careers could be over before they start.

University authorities have been handling numerous complaints about the misuse of social media by teacher candidates.

Since 2009, the University of Manitoba has had a system whereby people can bring complaints about the professional conduct of education students.

In the past seven months 12 allegations of misconduct have been brought to the attention of Dr. Jerome Cranston, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs. Just over half were addressed without proceeding to the Professional Unsuitability Committee, but of the five that did, four were for misuse of social media.

"They posted personal criticisms and negative, disparaging comments about professors, and in some cases about school division policy and enforcement of those policies," he says. "We are sensitive to the fact that Canadian courts have been quite generous with students, allowing them to critique the quality of a professor's instruction. What isn't allowable is potty-mouth name calling. It's extremely childish and immature behavior and that's why we call into question their suitability."

"In all cases it's behavior falling outside of the professional code of conduct of The Manitoba Teachers' Society. We say to them, 'You want to be a teacher? These are the standards in place for practicing teachers and we're going to start holding you to them as of now. It has to do with how you're going to engage with your colleagues, your school principal or your divisional superintendents. It's the kind of conversations through social media that are not professional.'"

"We see teaching candidates who, when it comes to social media, don't seem to be able to distinguish between their personal connectivity and what it means to represent an entire profession."

Cranston works with social media guidelines from other institutions and those already developed at the U of M.

"Everybody in the professional faculties here are reacting to this new reality and trying to catch up. There is not one who's ahead of the curve. One of the things we are looking at is working with the education students' council to develop social media guidelines."

While problems exist in other faculties, they are magnified for teacher candidates.

"It's the nature of teaching, by its very special status, that is so fraught with potential pitfalls."

"In real life there is no 'undo' or 'erase' button in the classroom, but on these sites there is, so why haven't they done it? In the cases where I've looked at professional unsuitability specifically with relation to social media, it really is an uncomfortable familiarity with expressing themselves however they see fit without realizing that what we say and write comes with consequences."

And Cranston doesn't have much sympathy for those invoking their freedom of expression.

"I'm pretty quick to remind them that as teachers we are held to a higher standard. We just don't have the level of freedom of expression allowed or enjoyed by the general public."

This realization, especially in the context of social media, seems to be particularly difficult for teacher candidates to grasp and is the centre of sometimes spirited debate in the faculty of education of other Manitoba universities.

Corrine Barrett de Wiele is a professor at the University of St. Boniface, Faculty of Education whose course "The Role of School in Society" parallels that taught at the University of Manitoba.

"In the course, we talk about the role and responsibility of teachers so we start with the premise that you are a teacher 24/7," she says.

Students debate the role of social media as it pertains to The Education

Administration Act, the Criminal Code section 153, as well as the Code of Professional Practice of The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

"There's still a lot of discussion over privacy and the perceived 'right' to post whatever they wish. We sometimes have a hard time getting them to appreciate that up to a point, yes, that is true, but because of their special status, their whole life will change as a teacher and this is only one of the most public ways."

de Wiele says some students have shut down their pages and those that don't are warned to engage strict privacy settings to keep what they write from students.

"Some students are very tech savvy and will cause you nothing but grief. In other cases it's the parents who do the digging."

Michael Nantais, assistant professor of education at Brandon University, says social media has become a big part of his internet-based media course.

"I look at it from the perspective of the student teacher and the future teacher. One of the first things I get them to do is 'Google yourself' and see what shows up. I don't make it as a scary thing because I think there's already too much fear about using social media. I look at it from the point of view that whatever you put out there is permanent and it can be seen by many people you never intended. We look at various way of maintaining control."

"Just recently, we looked at the social media mishaps in the last issue of The Manitoba Teacher. With rare exception their reactions were 'What? How could they have been so stupid?' But there were others that brought up more of a 'really?' reaction. 'A person got fired for that?'"

"What it comes down to is that as a teacher you have to sometimes live by standards that may not be your own."

"That last thing I would say to them is 'Don't use it.' It's to the point where, if you aren't using it, people might start to question it. So I say, you should have a digital footprint, but you have to manage it and you need to keep it positive."

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TheresaOswald.ca



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MLA for Southdale
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ErinSelby.ca



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RonKostyshyn.ca



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