

THE MANITOBA

Teacher

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015 VOLUME 93 NUMBER 4 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

THE PARENT PUZZLE

*A dilemma almost all
teachers strive to solve*

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The
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THE MANITOBA **Teacher**

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Correction: In the December 2014 issue of *The Teacher* we ran a story entitled *Open Books*. One of the schools featured was incorrect—Robert Browning School should be replaced with École Robert H. Smith School in Winnipeg's River Heights neighbourhood. We apologize for the error.



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

PAUL OLSON

I'd like you to try a thought experiment. I won't know how you did, there's no need to do any data entry on a crashing computer system, and the next steps, as you'll see, are optional.

Step one: Write down between three and five big ideas that you could pursue that would dramatically improve student learning.

Got your list? Okay.

Please note that I never said the list had to be things you'd actually do as part of your job. Knowing that—would you keep the same list?

Teachers work through a professional paradigm—a way of gathering and processing information, and of interacting with students. It's this paradigm that makes teachers trusted as effective professionals.

But here's the paradox: to the extent that we choose to view the world through the lens of our day job—to the extent that we are, indeed, "professionally focussed" on instruction and learning—we risk ignoring the larger factors that impact that learning. As infinite pragmatists, we focus on our own work, on what we can influence or control at school.

Step two: Look at your list again, please. And then fix clearly, in your mind's eye, a good-sized handful of the neediest students you knew, or know.

The students I've taught who struggled most almost never struggled because of anything to do with school. When I look at my big impact list nowadays it includes things like a national childcare program, an integrated federal and provincial poverty and housing strategy, living wage legislation, and a robust mental health care system.

Clearly, we must still focus on instruction and learning. Fair enough. I'm not spending ink on these precisely because they're a given, not because I consider them unimportant.

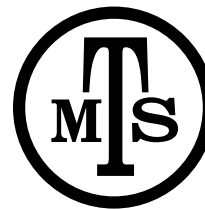
However, taking a step or two back for perspective—thinking not just as teachers, but as citizens—gives a very different list of top priorities than what we need on Monday morning. And what we need on Monday morning has a heck of a lot to do with the fact that the actual big impact list continues to go unaddressed by the broader society. Which is also us, by the way.

The Manitoba School Boards Association has taken a bold position with the Province regarding the next budget. Rather than ask for a huge increase in education spending, they've told government that the focus must be on the social determinants of student success, including housing, poverty reduction, and family supports for children right from birth onward. I, for one, commend them for it. The school boards get it.

The big problems that we struggle to address every day in school are not actually 'school problems'. Once the plans, prep, instruction, assessment, and reporting are done for the day or the week, the teacher-professional must also be the teacher-citizen.

Focussing almost all our energy on school interventions is akin to finding better ways to park ambulances at the base of a cliff. Long term, the only sane option is to reduce the number of kids hitting the ground.

Paul Olson



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INSIDE MTS

KEN PEARCE, GENERAL SECRETARY

As we start 2015, I want to let you know about some new initiatives being undertaken by your staff in 2015. As some of you may be aware, the Society has broadened its service to members recently by undertaking additional insurance provisions through a Short Term Disability initiative. As a result, staff members in our Disability Benefits Plan department have been undertaking the implementation of the new program that now has 19 participating associations. The momentum continues to grow as collective agreements are put in place around the province; eight local associations have proposed participation in the plan in their opening proposals to school boards. In sheer numbers, this means that we currently have 7,400 covered members in the Short Term

Disability Plan and expect the number to be at slightly over 10,000 shortly.

The Society continues to provide excellent insurance plan coverage to members and, using staff expertise, has developed both long and short term disability plans that continue to provide exceptional service to members at a very reasonable cost—in fact, our Long Term Disability Plan has seen premium costs drop by fifty percent over the past eight years; a testament to staff and volunteer members on plan committees. These initiatives demonstrate just one part of the Society's continued success in providing enviable service to members!

Another recent addition to our efforts is being provided through the addition of a Wellness Facilitator to develop wellness initiatives provincially to public school teachers. This initiative, undertaken on a

two-year trial basis, will hopefully bring additional benefits to the success of our short and long term disability plans. By working together, staff at the Society will explore ways to protect member life and work balance and create healthy lifestyles that promote well-being and enable the Society to continue to give members excellent all-round services.

On a final note this month, our research department policy analysts continue to provide factual timely responses to media and other enquiries regarding myriad aspects of financial and professional questions that regularly assail the Society. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the group for their prompt and energetic responses for briefings on what is sometimes very short notice!

HONOUR YOUR STUDENTS' GOODNESS

NOMINATE THEM FOR A YOUNG HUMANITARIAN AWARD!

Nomination forms are up at mbteach.org and deadline for submissions is Friday, April 10, 2015, at 4:00 p.m.

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From left: Villa Rosa teacher Kathy Redekopp
and Villa Rosa Executive Director Kathy Strachan



DOWN but not OUT

BY JENNIFER MCFEE

Some teens in the school system face problems that go well beyond the intricacies of algebra or Shakespeare.

They are pregnant, alone and afraid, often facing issues of addiction and abuse, homelessness and hunger.

Many are saved by Villa Rosa, a safe haven for expectant women of all ages, including young girls.

In this environment, the moms-to-be are given a glimmer of hope through education and social support, along with healthy meals and a warm bed.

This Wolseley-based facility maintains 25 beds that provide some solace to about 80 pregnant girls and women each year.

Executive director Kathy Strachan explains that there is always a waitlist for a spot in the facility. The majority of residents are teens and young women who have been brought up in the care of the system, jumping from one foster home to another. Currently, about 70 per cent of the moms are Aboriginal, another 20 per cent are Caucasian and 10 per cent are new immigrants.

"There are lots of addictions issues, abuse, involvement in the justice system and gangs," Strachan says. "There is family dysfunction for generations. Lots of them have no contact with their family, or the contact is not a positive thing."

Typically, these vulnerable girls arrive from across the province when they are about six months pregnant and stay for a month after giving birth. They can self-refer through an intake social worker, and after they leave, they have the option to voluntarily maintain contact through a follow-up program.

In a building next door, another eight post-natal suites provide an opportunity for new moms to prepare for independent living and continue their schooling in a supported environment. A staff member remains on site throughout the night to help with everything from breastfeeding to removing unwanted guests. These suites operate at 100-per-cent occupancy and residents can stay for up to a year.

At both locations, the average age is 17 to 23, although Villa Rosa accepts moms-to-be who

are much younger or much older. Regardless of age or educational background, everyone is required to attend school programs while they live at the facility.

"Even if you're 30 years old, there's always things you can take, such as computer upgrading," Strachan says. "One of our biggest goals is to get them hooked back into school because if they've been bouncing around foster homes, the behavioural issues start taking over everything in their lives. They don't believe they're smart."

Many of the moms have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, which adds to their struggles in the classroom. As well, many haven't attended school regularly for years due to tumultuous situations in their lives.

"Sometimes they're 17 and they haven't been in school since they were 13. Apart from helping them decide what their future is for themselves and their baby, a huge part of what we do is getting them back in school and getting them to believe that they can accomplish something," Strachan says.

"All of a sudden, they realize they actually

How it all began

In 1848, the Sisters of Misericordia were founded on the mission to work with single, pregnant women in Montreal.

Fifty years later, a bishop sent some of these nuns to Winnipeg, where there were no services for unwed mothers at the time.

The sisters traversed the river system by canoe dressed in full habit as they bartered and begged for food and supplies, maintaining logbooks about their situation. They had no funding, and society often rejected them for helping women who were deemed unfit.

"It doesn't matter if you were assaulted. If you were pregnant and unmarried, you were absolutely shunned from society," explains Villa Rosa executive director Kathy Strachan.

A small group of nuns arrived in Winnipeg in 1898. The following year, the Winnipeg Maternity Hospital (now known as the Misericordia Health Centre) was built for the nuns to work with pregnant women.

The new moms weren't able to keep their

babies, so the nuns also ran an orphanage in St. Norbert.

"There was no social service system. There was no adoption system. There was nowhere for these babies to go," Strachan says.

"If you didn't have a man to provide for you, there was no possible way you could keep your baby."

In 1965, the current Villa Rosa building was constructed and incorporated. It received charitable designation in 1967.

"The Misericordia nuns still exist today, but they're getting few and far between," Strachan says.

"Now they have no legal tie to Villa Rosa at all. We're not run as a faith-based organization anymore, but we continue to celebrate our history."

Since its inception, Villa Rosa has served more than 14,000 women and children. Each year, it serves about 300 people through its main residence, its post-natal house and follow-up programs.



could graduate. Maybe they're the first ones in their whole family that have ever graduated."

Through Winnipeg School Division's inter-divisional student services, 3.3 full-time equivalent teachers (split among four staff members), along with one full-time educational assistant provide education.

As a Villa Rosa teacher for the past 15 years, Kathy Redekopp knows both the challenges and the rewards of working in this unique environment. Usually the residents receive one-on-one instruction both before and after their babies are born. For those who have already given birth, volunteers and staff members take care of their infants in an on-site parent-child centre.

"Essentially, it's tutoring. If you stick them in a class with 20 or 30 students, they don't catch on. They already think they can't do it. They very quickly get kicked out or remove themselves," says Redekopp, who teaches family studies and physical education while also acting as a guidance counsellor.

"We work hard at getting them to see themselves as learners with potential. For the first while, you have to believe in them because they don't believe in themselves. Gradually, a couple months down the road, you see them beginning to think 'I'm not stupid. I can do this.' Those are the magic moments. That's what keeps us here."

Teachers work with the students at their own level, even if it means reinforcing elementary-school concepts.

"We're not regimented. We start wherever they're at and go from there. The one-on-one approach works because they don't have to take the same risks as in a group. If it's just me and the student, nobody has to know that we went back to Grade 2 number concepts," she says.

"Lately, we have many students who are simply lower functioning, and that provides a whole different set of challenges. For the last few years, we've been trying to develop some material that would be more suited for them."

Adding to its educational flexibility, Villa Rosa also offers a school-initiated life skills

course, which is submitted to the Department of Education for approval each year. This course allows students to accumulate all educational hours towards school credit. This includes the time they spend learning about decision-making, prenatal issues, breastfeeding and home economics.

"You need 55 hours anywhere in the province to get a half-credit in a course," Redekopp explains. "They might spend five hours in breastfeeding class or 10 hours in prenatal. We just add them all together. Once they hit 55 hours in whatever variety, we can give them a half-credit."

Although the new moms might not continue their education when they leave, they benefit from being exposed to a positive learning environment.

"When they leave here, most students have at least seen the possibility of future education. We always talk in terms of assuming they will go on someday. They just need to begin to have that possibility in their mind," Redekopp says.

"For some, it takes a couple years, and some probably never go back. But I think a fair amount of them are at least open to it as a possibility for them."

For those who do decide to continue, Villa Rosa has an endowment fund through the Winnipeg Foundation to provide scholarships towards any type of post-secondary education, Strachan adds.

"Our scholarship program is wide open and very informal. Not everybody is going to have the background for a professional degree, so we've supported women going through carpentry, hairdressing, anything post-secondary that is leading them towards employment.

"We helped put one of our grads through nursing. She's now a labour and delivery nurse at Women's Hospital, so she's helping in the delivery of other Villa Rosa moms. It's total full circle."

Villa Rosa also offers an after-school couple's program for dads who want to be

involved, Redekopp notes. Together, both parents can learn about labour and delivery, as well as childcare issues.

"So many of our moms come from the street, so the dad is a pimp or the dad is in jail. It's not a positive thing," she says.

"But sometimes there's a 16-year-old dad who wants to be involved, so getting the information is useful. Other times, it's not the dad but it's the partner who's going to be involved in raising the baby."

As for the girls and women who live at Villa Rosa, they don't need to pay for their stay. About half the funding comes from the provincial government, while the remainder from the United Way, along with donations and grants.

Currently, Villa Rosa is seeking donations of casual maternity clothes, plus sleepers and outfits for newborn babies up to three months old.

The organization aims to expand its second-stage housing for new moms, perhaps with an outreach social worker rather than live-in support.

While they work towards that goal, Villa Rosa staff and teachers continue to make a difference in the lives of girls and women, even through the smallest gestures.

"Every staff member will say good morning and usually knows their name. After they've been here for a few months, at least they know that there is another way to treat people. The amazing thing about this building is that everyone treats them with respect, and it changes them," Redekopp says.

"You gradually feel the walls around them falling away. They become different people because they don't have to keep those big walls to be safe. They recognize that nobody is attacking them and everybody treats them with respect. It is a place of hope."

For more information or to make a donation, visit www.villarosa.mb.ca or call 204-786-5741.

Villa Rosa wish list for donations:

- Casual maternity clothes
- Sleepers and outfits (newborn to three months)
- Diapers and baby wipes
- Bibs
- Receiving Blankets
- Quilts
- Personal items for moms (body lotion, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, makeup, body wash, soap)
- Nursing bras
- Nursing pads
- Maxi pads
- Baby slings
- Strollers
- Cribs (purchased after 1989)
- Laundry baskets
- Wastepaper baskets
- Hangers
- Blank calendars for current or next year
- Clock radios
- Fans
- Heaters
- Household items for residents when they move out on their own (dishes, glasses, cutlery, utensils, glassware, cookware, baking supplies, casserole dishes, coffee makers, toaster, pots and pans, etc.)



THE PARENT PUZZLE

NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT IDENTITIES

BY MATEA TUHTAR

Jody distinctly remembers running into a former student on the street one day, years after what she calls a bizarre situation in which that student's parents accused her of "being part of a plot to persecute their kid."

Jody's offence?

She escorted the student to the principal's office after an incident between that child and another teacher, which prompted the parents to complain to the school administration that Jody was telling the other teachers to pick on their child.

"It still makes no sense," she says. "But as soon as I saw him that day, years later, my anxiety rose way up," she recalls. "I couldn't help but think—is he going to tell his mom he saw me, and is she now going to accuse me of stalking her child? What other crazy thing is she going to accuse me of?"

For many teachers, Jody's story would not seem surprising.

A recent poll of members done by The Manitoba Teachers' Society found that 94 per cent of public school teachers have had similar experiences with parents.

And in Ontario, a survey entitled *Bullying in the Workplace*, conducted for three teachers' organizations found that:

- Over one-half of elementary and secondary teachers have been personally bullied during their professional careers;

- Bullying by parents is the second most prevalent form of bullying, with 36 per cent of teachers working in elementary schools and 22 per cent of teachers working in secondary schools being bullied.

"I think most teachers nowadays have paranoia about parents," says Mary, a high school teacher in Winnipeg. "And if they don't from the start, they develop it really quickly."

This paranoia was heard time and time again from teachers we interviewed and whose real names we have changed in this article. All had stories such as parents bombarding teachers with emails, coming into a classroom uninvited, making voice mail threats and lodging complaints to senior administration.

"It's weird to talk about teachers being bullied because sometimes something will happen and you'll think—is this bullying or just a bad experience with someone and I just need to toughen up?" asks Dan, who says he remembers a few rather "belligerent" parents in his 10 years of teaching junior high. "I wonder if there are people excluding themselves because they think 'Well I can't really complain because it was just XYZ.'"

MTS Staff Officer Diane Beresford says she sees parent bullying as a growing issue.

"I think parents have started to see

themselves as consumers of a service. Public education isn't owned by parents, it's owned by society. But there's this sense that they purchase a service from the school, so they have this sense of ownership and entitlement. This belief has led to some completely inappropriate behavior in some cases."

Behaviour can include different forms, from subtle digs to all-out harassment, and gossip in real life and online.

Corinne Barrett DeWiele, a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the Université de Saint-Boniface, has 28 years of experience in Manitoba's public schools in various roles, including principal and consultant for the St. James-Assiniboia School Division. She is currently writing a thesis on the topic of parent bullying, and says some of the worst offees are uncivil emails sent at night by an irate parent.

"It happened often. I used to tell my teachers, don't open your emails at night, because you can't deal with them and then you just fret all night and don't sleep," says Barrett DeWiele. "The parent hears one side of the story and writes an email in the heat of the moment, and it's often full of swear words, calling the teacher down and calling into question their professionalism."

High school teacher Allyson remembers getting an incensed email from a parent where the first line read "I shouldn't

While some parents can add to a teacher's grief, there are ways to cope. *The Teacher* compiled a few suggestions collected through interviews and other research.

SET UP POSITIVE COMMUNICATION FROM THE START

The biggest key to building a relationship with parents is open and helpful communication. That doesn't have to mean instantly answering every email you receive at all hours of night and day, unless of course that is your cup of tea (we're going to guess and say that it isn't). Creating communication systems that work for you, and fit into your schedule, will leave parents satisfied and feeling connected while leaving more time in your day for actual teaching. Brief weekly newsletters, a blog that is updated regularly, or a parent handbook that gets sent home every time something of note happens can all be effective ways of keeping parents in the know, and your inbox looking a little bit less frazzled.

The crucial aspect of keeping the communication lines between parent and teacher open is to start early, before problems begin. Many schools have open houses at the beginning of the year where parents and teachers can meet, but a letter home introducing yourself and a brief summary of your curriculum for the year can be helpful. The letter can even include a brief form for parents to fill out with information about their child, and a questionnaire of how they'd best prefer to collaborate with you in their child's education.

Don't feel the need to constantly update parents, but an occasional 'good news' call or email can make all the difference in a parent's attitude, and go a long way in building a relationship with families, especially those who have not had much positive news from school.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

That first introduction you have with parents at the start of the school year is the best time to let them and your students know just what it is you expect in your classroom this year. Let them know the rules and guidelines of your classroom. If you make a point of never accepting late assignments let it be known now, so if a parent has a problem down the line, you can show them that this isn't a 'made up' rule or your way of picking on their child.

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent teacher conferences are a great time to discuss concerns and problems, but also achievements. If you feel nervous, remember parents are often feeling anxious too. They all want to hear that their child is doing well, or at least getting better. Create an inviting environment for them when they come in. Provide them with adult sized chairs too and don't sit and talk from behind your desk. Check the need for a translator if the family's first language isn't English.

If you feel uncomfortable meeting with a particular parent, ask someone to sit in with you, whether it's a principal or a colleague.

IF PROBLEMS ARISE

If despite your best efforts, you encounter hostile or difficult parents, keep calm and be professional. Wait a while before responding to an angry email and don't write something you might regret later. Use inclusive language when talking to the parents such as 'We have a problem' and 'What can we do to resolve this?' Keep a record of all interactions with the parents.

If you can't resolve a situation with a parent yourself, go to your principal for support, or contact MTS if you don't feel like you have that support in place.

be writing this when I'm angry but..." and then went on to list a number of accusations and criticism. Allyson says she cried when she first received the letter, but later on became angry.

"Why would this person think that this is okay? Why write something in an email that you can't take back?"

Barrett DeWiele agrees.

"Once an email is sent, it's forever. And I'm not sure that parents understand that—it's not like the teacher just hits delete and the email is gone. That teacher will put it in their child's file to refer to later. So the repercussion, if it becomes harassment later on, can be great. And they're probably not doing their child any favors."

Not only is an email forever, but the Internet rarely forgets, which is why online bullying can be particularly damaging and potentially destroy a teacher's career or reputation. Parents are a lot less likely to edit themselves online, whether it's venting on social media, posting bad reviews, or gossiping about a particular teacher.

"The online part is a whole other can of worms," says Judy. "A few years ago I made the mistake of going on one of the 'Rate My Teacher' websites and there was a comment about my personal life on there." Judy says she was an easy target at that time, and for some reason, her personal life seemed like news. "I'm so paranoid about the online stuff because once it's there, it's almost impossible to fight against it. And if parents google your name, they can see this stuff and judge. It's really scary."

It's not that teachers don't want to hear feedback from parents—in fact, every teacher interviewed said that they prefer to have open communication between themselves and parents, and that they'd prefer the parents talk to them first about any issues or problems before the situation gets out of hand.

"What used to exist is that parents used to call the school and ask 'Hey what about this situation that my kid told me about—what's going on?' That doesn't happen anymore, now it's this immediate aggressive response," says Lisa, a high-school math teacher who's had a mother organize a group to meet with the school administration about her job performance—all over a perceived slight with her child.

While communication is important, there are some parents who take it too far with constant emails, phone calls and questions, which, friendly or not, would be considered another type of bullying that takes up a lot of teachers' time during and

Terry Beazley, principal at Killarney School, knows firsthand how parent bullying can spin out of control. He, along with then vice-principal Darlene McKenzie, were the targets of systematic harassment and bullying over a period of years, started by the husband of a fellow school colleague.

The colleague felt aggrieved over a job transfer, and her husband put it on himself to right the perceived wrong. It turned into a nightmare for Beazley and McKenzie.

The husband, with the backing of his wife, created a petition around the community spreading vicious rumours about the school administration, organized a group of parents to back him up, wrote letters to the school board that were full of lies, and showed up during parent council meetings to verbally abuse the principal.

A restraining order was granted after "a lot of intimidation aimed at the school staff, from stare-downs, eye-rolls and undermining comments, as well as purposely driving beside staff in the parking lot, almost running someone over," recalls Beazley.

Despite repeated talks with parents, the superintendent and school board, things continued to escalate, and by the time the harassment finally died down it had involved the Manitoba Labour

Board, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and a lawsuit against MTS. It also culminated in a rare MTS review committee decision to recommend that the teacher responsible for the harassment have her teaching certificate revoked.

"It was such a crazy time in our lives. I feared for my safety," says McKenzie. "I was afraid to take walks late at night. I was worried for my daughter. It affected my everyday life, not just the time I spent in school."

Throughout the ordeal one of the things that kept both Beazley and McKenzie's spirits up was "the incredible support from MTS" as well as their local Teachers' Association.

"There were months there where I felt like a zombie," says Beazley. "Bobbi Taillefer was the MTS Staff Officer at the time dealing with my case and there was a year where she was here almost every week, offering help and advice."

Beazley and McKenzie both agree that if a teacher has a harassment situation come up they need to contact MTS right away.

"That's what the Society is there for," says McKenzie. "I can't imagine how much time and money was spent just on this case, but that's why we have the Society. I'm a much stronger supporter of our local and the union now."

after work hours.

"You have parents who are constantly emailing you and questioning your decisions 'Why is this and why is that? Can you tell me what my child will do today? Couldn't my child do this instead; couldn't you make an exception?' Always trying to bend the rules," says Mary who has one particularly demanding parent she's been dealing with for three years.

Helicopter parents, constantly hovering over their children can be exhausting to deal with for teachers and can impact the time they have to work with other kids in the class.

"With the constant request of feedback by parents via email, phone calls or visits, teachers are feeling that it all gives them less time to prepare, less time to teach, and less time to interact," says Beresford. "All that takes away from their ability to meet the diverse needs of their classroom, and leaves them feeling stressed and harried." Beresford says that administrators don't always seem to grasp the effect that constant contact, verbal abuse or just being on edge all the time waiting for the next blow up, can have on a teacher. "They don't always seem to get the toll that it takes on a teacher."

In Lisa's case, her principal gave her a heads up and provided support during the meeting, but while principals should be the teacher's main ally when it comes to parent bullying, not all school administrators are as helpful.

"About 80 per cent of the time I feel our admin is supportive," says Judy, who teaches middle years in Winnipeg's inner city. "But other times I feel that the administrators just want the situation handled quickly and off their plate."

Judy recalls a time when a co-worker was called down to the principal's office with no warning, and made to apologize to a student's parents standing there waiting for her. "The teacher was so shocked she went through with it, but that was totally out of bounds."

I'm a much stronger supporter of our local and the union now.

A supportive school administration is key, says Beresford, adding that a teacher should contact MTS if things aren't being dealt with at the school level. "A teacher needs that support from the principal. A good principal will act as a buffer. Workplace Safety and Health requires a harassment and violence policy in every school division and no one should work in an environment where harassment or violence occurs. So if you have a problem with a parent and your principal says 'I'll deal with it—I'll help you out' then you probably don't need us. But if that isn't

the case then call us and we'll coach you, and the principal and senior administration if necessary. We'll provide help."

While some parents follow the protocol of contacting teachers first, some go straight to the superintendent.

"There's a weight-throwing that happens, when parents are getting their way through their position and community connection," says Lisa, "and I think the board office now will do anything to avoid parents going to the press. And if a parent knows that, they have that leverage."

It all comes back to that consumerism attitude, says Beresford. "Some parents see the school as a service they're buying, and they act just like as if they went to the car dealership, there's an attitude of the customer is always right."

"They want to do right for their child, but sometimes this means being pushy or demanding."

Indeed, this desire to protect their children is the driving factor behind most of parent bullying behavior.

"Parents don't come in with a wish or desire to bully teachers. Parents come in and they're advocating for their child as best as they know how. Sometimes they don't know the processes," says the MTS Assistant General Secretary Bobbi Taillefer. "I always used to say to teachers 'The kids send us the best parents they've got.' So we have to figure out how to work with parents to help the kids."

If music is the universal language, then Kenley Kristofferson is fluent in several of its dialects.

Kristofferson—by day a music teacher at the Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School (or the Comp as it's commonly known)—rode a musical high recently that saw him compose an eight-minute piece, called *Morgun*, for the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's Nordic Festival.

He got to see two performances of it in Winnipeg and one in Brandon.

In contrast to the big room and the big sounds of an orchestra, Kristofferson's work can also be heard on several video games, including the fun *Betty Boop Bop* and *Ducktails Scrooge's Loot* along with the deeper and darker *Warhammer 40K: Horus Heresy*.

Knowing something you've created is out there for public consumption is without a doubt a huge measure of success for any musician, and Kristofferson would agree, but he'd also tell you that it can't compare to teaching students in a high school.

He was on sabbatical last semester and spent time working

on various aspects of his music career, including a three-week stint at a composers' workshop in Banff in November, but he was readying himself to return to Selkirk and the Comp in February.

"I'm super excited about it," Kristofferson said during a phone interview from Banff.

"I'm really looking forward to it, I'm going to keep doing both as long as I can. Teaching is way too much fun to become a full-time composer."

But his musical interludes outside the classroom definitely help with his teaching, and with his street cred.

The video game work, he said, is where most of his composition efforts land, and he's able to show his students what he's been working on. The fact that kids are really into video games helps earn him the much sought after title of 'cool teacher'.

"It helps. My old advisor used to call it 'with-it-ness,'" he laughed.

"You have to keep engaging in popular culture, that's where kids are, right?"

His students were quite impressed with the WSO performance of *Morgun* too,

Concer

and several showed up for the October 31 and November 1 Winnipeg performances, where Kristofferson, who is of Icelandic descent, sat in the audience soaking in the moment before slipping out a nearby exit to join the WSO on stage to take a bow and wave to the crowd.

It was members of the Icelandic Festival of Manitoba that commissioned Kristofferson, along with another composer from Iceland, to each do a piece in recognition of the 125th anniversary of Icelandic settlers arriving in Gimli.

"They asked me, and I thought, I don't know, I thought maybe it was kind of a pipe dream, like 'yeah, sure, I'll compose for the symphony, no problem,' and you just wait for the money to fall through. You wait for something to happen, and then nothing happened. Everything went perfectly," he said.

"It was kind of stressful because you're writing for the highest level ensemble in your community. There's nothing higher than the symphony in Winnipeg."

It took him six months to compose *Morgun*, which is about the Icelanders coming over to Canada and the trials and tribulations of looking forward to their new life, all the

Photo Credit:
Mike Latschislaw

while lamenting the loss of their old life.

The performances in Winnipeg were special for Kristofferson, and not just because it was his music, but because on that night his musical loves all came together in one space.

“A whole bunch of kids from the school came, which was awesome, I got lots of great support from the students. A bunch of staff came...it was just a really nice culmination of all the things I do in my life, in one place.”

Kristofferson teaches music at the school alongside fellow instructor Michael Brandon, and he said when students see their instructors perform, or hear their work performed by others, like the WSO, it impacts them. The teacher becomes one of them, he said, someone who has to practice and learn new pieces or lock himself away and write.

“The kids see that we’re making music too. We’re not just standing in front of them waving a stick. We’re making music,” he said.

“Michael and I try really hard to show that. During the school musical, Michael always plays piano. And it’s so

I haven’t been by myself writing for this extended period for so long.

“I usually write at night. I teach all day and then I go home and I write from six till 10 or something. And then do it all over again. But when it’s two o’clock in the afternoon and you’ve been writing for six hours, you’re kind of waiting for a kid to knock on your door so you can be social – so you can see other human beings.”

For the past three years, Kristofferson has been teaching a composition class at the Comp, and despite the class’ infancy, Brandon said the benefits to students are already evident.

“How amazing to have a working and active composer teaching composition right here at Lord Selkirk Regional. His composition class is only three-years-old in our program but already we have a student majoring in composition at U of M’s Faculty of Music.”

Brandon said Kristofferson “inspires kids on a daily basis”, and he’s a huge part of the music program’s success.

Kristofferson said he’s not sure when he decided he wanted to be a music teacher, but it was likely when he was in Grade 12 at Gimli High School, being inspired by his teacher, Mike Cherlet.

“It was transformative, changed

to for the Classroom

good for the kids to see him, sweating behind 200 pages of piano music.”

Brandon said he, and the students, benefit from Kristofferson’s immense talents.

“It’s a pleasure to work with the talent that is Kenley Kristofferson. He is a wonderful music educator and his talent for writing is a gift that we enjoy in this program very much,” Brandon said.

“Not only do we benefit from reading drafts of some of his new compositions for concert band, we get to witness his growth and success as a composer. This is a great model for students.”

During his sabbatical, Kristofferson was able to spend much more time writing than he normally does. While he was in Banff, he said, he enjoyed every minute of his time spent with fellow musicians, but he also found himself missing the classroom and ultimately, his students.

“Composing is really fun, but it’s a different energy than having 60 teenagers in front of you,” Kristofferson said. “It’s interesting being on sabbatical, because

my whole life, that class.”

He said Cherlet was a great band teacher and he started thinking that he might be able to be that too.

“Somewhere around Grade 12 I was like, ‘I could do this, I could be that teacher.’ I like music, and I like working with people.”

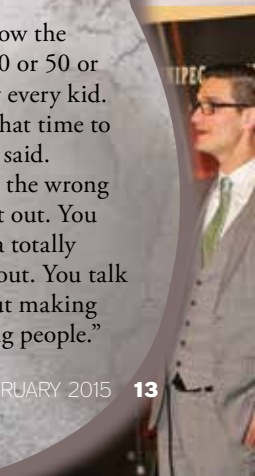
Sabrina Kendall is in Grade 12 at the Comp and said Kristofferson has achieved his goal.

“I love how positive he is,” said Kendall, a trumpet player in both the jazz and junior symphonic bands. “He and Mr. Brandon both, are very much about taking care of students, before teaching them, and I feel like that’s such a great philosophy. It really does help us learn.

“If you need help he’s always got different ways to teach you and he’s really awesome.”

Kristofferson said connecting with kids is the most important part of his job. Not every kid that walks into music class has natural ability, and Kristofferson said he takes it one day at a time to help bring them along. That could be extra work after school

BY DONNA MAXWELL



BREAKING BARRIERS

BY JUDY OWEN

ERS

Should I try to dull my accent in order to get a job? Should I wear my sari to a job interview?

Those are some of the questions members of The Educators of Colour Network ask when discussing Manitoba's education system.

The answers aren't always cut and dry, but the fact those questions crop up is one reason why the non-profit organization is a valuable resource for all educators.

"We are a broader community and we're all responsible for whether or not we want to create a more welcoming face of education within our school systems," said network founder Michelle Jean-Paul, principal of École Belmont in the Seven Oaks School Division.

The network started in the fall of 2008 and membership is free and open to anyone with an interest in diversity in educators. Its mandate is to provide high-quality professional development, including for substitute teachers who may not have access to professional development offered to full-time teachers.

About two free events are held each year on topics suggested by its 130 members. Workshops have been about assessment, technology, the hiring process, supporting English as an Additional Language learners and understanding how to support students from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

The next event is January 19, 2015, at the Louis Riel School Division's board office (4:30–6:30 p.m.). Anyone interested in attending is asked to email educatorsofcolour@gmail.com to help with a head count.

A panel of representatives from Winnipeg School Divisions will talk about hiring practices.

"A lot of our members feel that there are barriers to employment and so they're very interested in the interview process and the hiring process," Jean-Paul said.

She's one of the network's four leaders, which include Sherry Jones from the Winnipeg School Division, Jason Pinder from Seven Oaks and Cynthia Taylor from Louis Riel. Duane Brothers, superintendent of Louis Riel, is a consultant and mentor.

Jean-Paul was born in Manitoba, but her father came from Haiti in 1970 during an influx of black Caribbean educators who had to re-certify. She

grew up listening to stories about the challenges they faced and they became her mentors.

She co-ordinates informal mentorships between network members and administrators "who are going to be frank and earnest" in terms of what members need to improve on.

When questions arise about clothing or accents, the reality is those can be factors in getting a job, but not always, she said.

"Maybe it's not a question of their accent or the fact that they're wearing cultural clothing, but if they perceive it to be, that can become a barrier to engaging with the system and feeling that there's a place for them in the education system."

Members aren't told to conform.

"That's not what we believe," Jean-Paul said. "We want people to think, 'OK, do you feel as though that's the avenue that you want to take to get the job?'"

"At the end of the day, we want people to be maintaining their own personal integrity."

Jean-Paul taught five years at École Sacré-Coeur and moved on to become Garden Grove School's vice-principal for two years. She was also vice-principal at Garden City Collegiate for three years and is in her second year as École Belmont's principal.

She'll never forget when she got her first administrative appointment.

"A colleague of mine that I was working with at the time said, 'You know why you got the job?' I said, 'Why would that be?' She said, 'Well, the colour of your skin,'" Jean-Paul recalled.

The comments were surprising, and yet not surprising.

"It's been my experience that with each advancement in my career, there has been at least one person who has tried to imply that I was successful because of my cultural heritage."

Jones has taught for 10 years at Garden Grove and has been a term vice-principal at the school.

She's from a mixed race background and admitted she sometimes felt confused about where her place was. A new generation of kids may have the same experiences and

that's one of the reasons why she believes it's important educators come from diverse backgrounds.

Feedback about the network's benefits has been positive.

"It's not just the members who come," Jones said. "It's us as leadership, it's the guests we invite to come and speak."

"Everybody speaks so highly about just being in that environment and being able to have the conversations. That's the most valuable part."

The Educators of Colour Network leader Sherry Jones (left) and founder Michelle Jean-Paul. Photo by Judy Owen.



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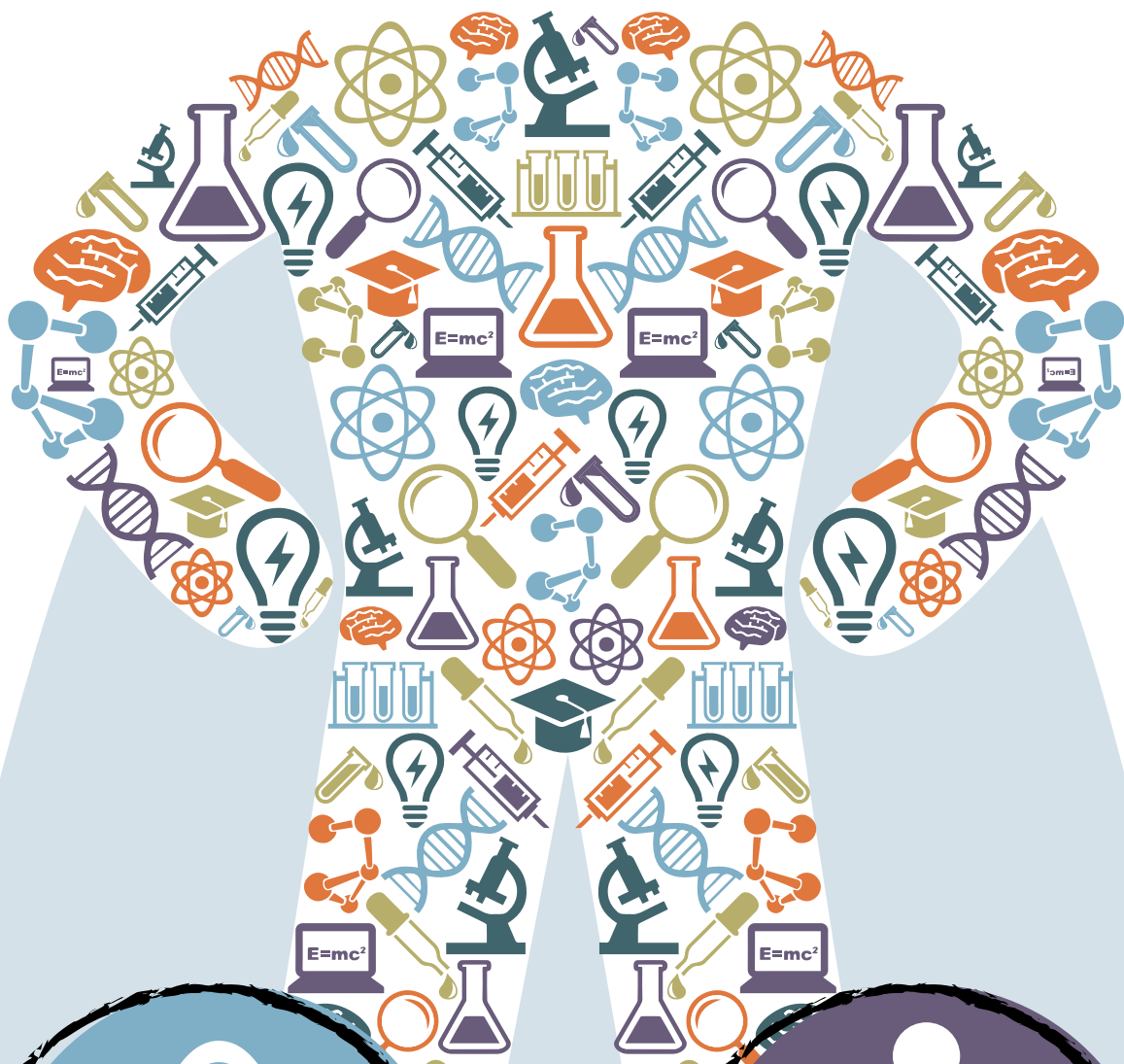
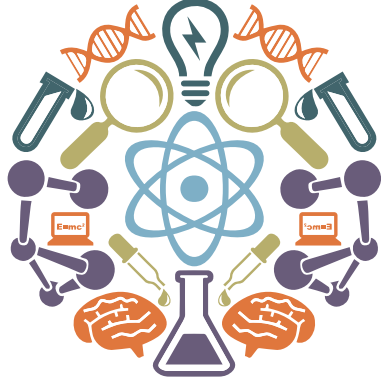
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JUSTICE RESONANCE

BY JENNIFER MCFEE

“SCIENCE HAS A LOT OF POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS THAT MOST PEOPLE DON’T TRULY REALIZE. I TRY TO INTRODUCE SOME OF THOSE ETHICAL ISSUES AND THOSE POLITICAL ISSUES, SINCE A LOT OF SCIENCE THAT IS DONE NOWADAYS IS SET BY THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE.”

— BARBARA GAJDA

SCIENCE AND BIOLOGY TEACHER, GARDEN CITY COLLEGIATE



The equation is simple: science + social justice = savvy students.

The subject of social justice is often sewn seamlessly into classes that focus on history, language arts and social studies.

But does it also have a place in the science classroom?

For science teacher Barbara Gajda, social justice is an integral part of scientific study.

As a science and biology teacher at Garden City Collegiate, Gajda tries to incorporate broader social lessons into the curriculum.

“The challenge with science is that there is a lot of content. I teach at the high school level, and there are competing philosophies. When you ask what’s the purpose of a science education, a lot of teachers will say it’s to prepare science students to be successful in university,” she says.

“Now, that’s not the philosophy that I share. I believe that one of my jobs as a science teacher is to help students become more scientifically literate and understand that not all students who take sciences are going to become biologists.”

Instead of simply preparing students for university, Gajda’s goal is to create a sense of scientific literacy.

“Science has a lot of political ramifications that most people don’t truly realize. I try to introduce some of those ethical issues and those political issues, since a lot of science that is done nowadays is set by the current political climate,” she says.

“Science is being extremely politically driven. People like to think of it as a pure discipline with people in their ivory towers, but it’s not. It’s really connected to what’s going on in the country. It gets really complex, but a lot of science teachers may not be aware of all these nuances because they never actually lived or worked as a scientist.”

In contrast, Gajda began her academic career with the ambition to become a

scientist rather than a teacher. She was on the road to getting her PhD, but at the same time, she was also heavily involved in an international development organization. She volunteered her time in faraway places such as El Salvador, Brazil and Mongolia. Her social justice work also allowed her to give presentations to high school students, which led her to change career paths so that she could continue to reach teens at their level.

“In terms of what science then becomes in the classroom, we need to think about what’s relevant to students in the long run. We can flood and bombard the students with a lot of little details that they have to remember. But when you take the perspective of someone who cares about social justice, you have to step back and say, ‘What’s the end point of all this?’” she says.

“Yes, I might need to get my students to memorize all the different enzymes that are in the stomach and small intestine, but then what does that really mean when they go back and see their doctor with digestive problems? Or what does that mean in terms of their health and taking care of their family?”

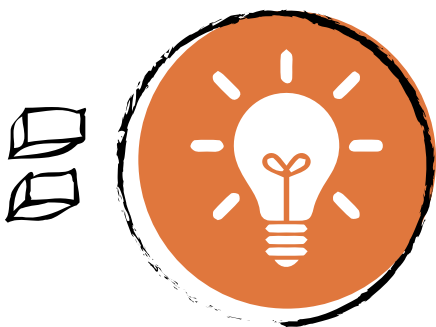
As a member of the Manitoba Educators for Social Justice, Gajda is committed to creating a better society by empowering students through education. But since she is currently the only science teacher in the organization, she hopes others will also get involved in the cause.

“There are never any PD opportunities for me to look at social justice, environmental issues and science. It’s quite difficult. As a science teacher, I definitely sometimes feel that I’m working in a bit of a vacuum. It’s rare, if non-existent, for like-minded science teachers who care about social justice and care about the environment to sit down and work together to generate ways of integrating social justice and environmental issues,” she says.

“THERE ARE NEVER ANY PD OPPORTUNITIES FOR ME TO LOOK AT SOCIAL JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND SCIENCE. IT’S QUITE DIFFICULT. AS A SCIENCE TEACHER, I DEFINITELY SOMETIMES FEEL THAT I’M WORKING IN A BIT OF A VACUUM. IT’S RARE, IF NON-EXISTENT, FOR LIKE-MINDED SCIENCE TEACHERS WHO CARE ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT TO SIT DOWN AND WORK TOGETHER TO GENERATE WAYS OF INTEGRATING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES.”

— BARBARA GAJDA

SCIENCE AND BIOLOGY TEACHER, GARDEN CITY COLLEGIATE



In general, Gajda says science teachers often focus their efforts to ensure that students understand the basic concepts in the curriculum.

“We’re always trying to find different ways to teach the concepts like the laws of motion and the basis of equilibrium and how chemical reactions occur. Those are fundamental ideas,” she says. “If students are having a hard time with that, then a lot of teachers aren’t going to look at applications—and how these applications might have positive or negative effects on the environment or on human population.”

When it comes to creating connections to social justice topics, Gajda has several suggestions for other science teachers.

“You can look at current events and see if there is anything in the current research that is applicable to what you’re talking about in science,” she says.

“One of the examples that I use in Grade 9 and 10 science is to look at



the use of pesticides in altering amphibian populations and fish populations. There are researchers in Canada who do a lot of research in the Great Lakes looking at the effects of pharmaceuticals.”

Another approach is to incorporate the perspective of non-European science.

“For example, in my astronomy unit, I’ll look at what was understood in indigenous cultures about astronomy because the Mayans were quite advanced. The Arab astronomers developed a lot of different types of technologies with a lot of understanding of astronomy. While Europe was in the dark ages, the Islamic astronomers were doing all sorts of things with astronomy,” she says.

“I think that’s showing respect for the knowledge that comes from other cultures and other societies. I consider that part of social justice because it’s recognizing that people don’t have to look like us to have valuable contributions to the body of knowledge that we now take for granted.”

Like Gajda, Grade 12 student Anika Hickey shares a similar perspective.

She would like to see more social and environmental issues incorporated into every subject, including science.

“I would definitely like to see teachers do more social justice teaching in class. I would really like that,” says the Garden City Collegiate student.

“Even with issues like global warming, I think science teachers should tie that in.”

For her, environmental issues fall under the social justice umbrella. That’s why she’s trying to spread ecological messages as part of the school’s environmental club.

“I think that with this awareness, we can also teach students how to build leadership skills and help in our community and make the world a better place.”

Gajda tries to integrate the messages in a cohesive way so students don’t even realize she is adding extra information.

“I just do it and it’s part of the curriculum, as far as I’m concerned. It’s just part of my classroom culture. If I’m having them work more with the existential and interpersonal issues, that’s where I’ll introduce a lot of ethical issues in terms of reproductive technologies. Or I’ll have them think about other perspectives and ask them to question conventional wisdom, which often is not all that wise,” she says.

This approach also helps her students to develop critical thinking skills outside the classroom.

“I truly believe that it is every citizen’s responsibility to be scientifically literate. That way, when you read an article about the newest health craze or about the environmental impact of the tar sands in Alberta, you’re responsible for critically analysing that. You can learn to separate what is the reliable information and what is spin,” Gajda says.

“And I think that’s just part of being an active member in a democracy. That’s just the responsibility of citizens.”

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PORTFOLIO

Climb the ladder? L

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

There may be some rational reasons to cut compensation for elected officials, but, if they exist, they didn't appear at the great severance debate last month at Winnipeg city hall.

Mayor Brian Bowman using the debate to squeeze off as many trashy insults at his opponents as possible topped it all with this gem: "I wish there was more appetite for my colleagues to have voted for the best interests of Winnipeggers who voted us all in, than there was to support their own interests."

That's just about as cheap and deep as the napkin he used to figure out this policy.

First, it appears Bowman feels that

council should always vote with public opinion, pretty much the antithesis of leadership. Great leaders lead, not float on the breeze of popular opinion like some birthday balloon.

Second, voting against changing a policy (civic compensation) that had been recommended by an outside consultant is not blatant self-interest. It is in the interests of the whole city that the compensation of councillors and the mayor allow and attract a variety of candidates, not just lawyers and business owners.

When the compensation for council was settled a few years ago it was done with the aid of an outside consultant for the very purpose of avoiding having council make recommendations on their own salaries.



Where compassion is a slogan

As the *Guardian* pointed out this past holiday season, various Walmarts in the U.S. turned to community food drives—to help its own workers. Last year an Ohio Walmart put out bins to collect food for employees. This year an Indiana Walmart held a bake sale to raise money for workers and one in Pennsylvania asked better-off employees to help colleagues in need.

The Walmart heirs, the Walton family, are worth \$144 billion. According to *Mother Jones* magazine, family members are among the least generous billionaires in America. Three members of the family, worth more than \$100 billion combined, contributed about \$2.7 million to charity between 2008 and 2013, or about .003 per cent of their net worth.

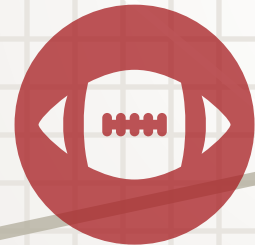


Free speech, at a cost

The Swiss food giant Nestlé fired a disabled worker after she criticized, on social media, a company memo that compared a member of staff to a dog. The company said she "undermined the authority" of managers.

The worker said in the post that the manager who wrote the memo should be "put under review" for using the word 'collare', meaning 'dog collar', in reference to a foreman who had been disciplined over health and safety rules at a factory in Perugia, Italy.

Designated in 2011 as the most profitable corporation in the world by *Global Fortune 500*, Nestlé has sales of nearly \$100 billion a year.



The NFL earns more than \$10 billion a year

Apparently overcome with the spirit of Christmas, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers announced they would no longer employ unpaid homeless men to be concessionaires.

The National Football League team had been giving the men food and housing in exchange for their work. The program had been called "work therapy" by those involved and "human trafficking" by opponents.

Meanwhile, the team has signed a defensive lineman to a six-year, \$95 million contract.

Let's push everybody off, instead

If anyone is to blame for this supposed self-interest vote it is the mayor. He's the one who brought it back to the table without anything to support it except his own rhetoric.

Bowman made quite a pretend show of supporting average workers in Winnipeg, pointing out that most of them do not receive severance payments when they leave a job, so councillors shouldn't either.

This is the argument we hear more and more often these days that compensation in so many areas should match what the lowest workers earn. It's a race to the bottom supported by the wealthy and their more conservative hand maidens.

Pensions? Not everybody has a pension or a good one, so nobody should. Holidays? Overtime? Salaries? Raises? Let's turn everybody, except the lawyers, into Walmart workers.

What this race to the bottom has meant is that the middle class has seen its wages grow all of seven per cent in the past 35

years, according to the federal finance department's own figures. Meanwhile, those at the tippy-top have needed larger wallets.

A recent study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that the gap between rich and poor is at its highest level in most OECD countries, including Canada, in 30 years.

"Today, the richest 10 per cent of the population in the OECD area earn 9.5 times more than the poorest 10 per cent. By contrast, in the 1980s the ratio stood at 7:1."

What's worse is that the study found that increasing inequality is a major drag on economic growth in all countries.

"The evidence is strongly in favour of one particular theory for how inequality affects growth: hindering human capital accumulation, income inequality undermines education opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, lowering social mobility and hampering skills development."

All that may seem a long way from the city council vote on severance payments, but it is just as supporters of the cut said,

Pensions? Not everybody has a pension or a good one, so nobody should. Holidays? Overtime? Salaries? Raises? Let's turn everybody, except the lawyers, into Walmart workers.

it was a symbolic gesture. They meant that it showed the public that councillors were willing to embrace all the clichés about tightening belts for the good of the city.

What it also symbolizes, however, is the idea that the best way to eliminate any financial problems is by cutting people's salaries and benefits, especially those in the public sector. And that gives private industry all the cover it needs to do the same thing.

And, if we haven't yet, we'll eventually reach the bottom—at least for most workers.



Free speech II

A long-time Delta Air Lines employee and labor activist was fired after expressing his support for an idea to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for airline workers. Kip Hedges gave an on-camera interview to a Minneapolis broadcaster in which he pointed out that probably half of Delta workers earn less than \$15 an hour.

Two months before the firing, Delta announced record profits for the fiscal quarter and projected it would earn a \$4 billion profit for the year.



Serving a nut, indeed

A Korean Air flight was ordered back to the gate so the head flight attendant could be kicked off for improperly serving Macadamia nuts.

The airline said that the vice-president of catering was aboard the plane and became enraged that the attendant was serving the nuts the wrong way. She ordered the crew member off the plane, thankfully not while it was in the air.

REFRESH

BY RAMAN JOB, PUBLIC RELATIONS FACILITATOR

Find your first tweet

You can't put bronze baby shoes on it, but you can look up your very first tweet if you head to <https://discover.twitter.com/first-tweet>. You can find the same information for any Twitter handle. Our @mbteachers account was born 2:41 p.m., 13 April 2011. How about yours?

Learn to love the Apple 'space hog'

Unless you have a newer iPhone, you probably have been loathe to download iOS 8. It's the biggest

space hog Apple has ever launched for mobile—and you have all those apps, vids and photos you don't want to delete, right? Well, Google these two blog posts from *Business Insider*. The first, *Here's Why iOS 8 Requires So Much Free Space To Download* is self-explanatory. Same with *How To Free Up Space On Your iPhone So You Can Download iOS 8*. The best take-away from these posts? This nugget: "You can also install iOS 8 by plugging your device into your computer and syncing with iTunes. That process won't require you to free up any extra space beyond the size of the actual update." Gold.

Scrub your nasty Instagram typo

Have you ever sent a classroom Instagram post only to realize you forgot a hashtag or made an embarrassing error or typo? The only way to fix that used to be to delete and start all over again. But for months now, you've been able to edit Instagram captions. That's right. Just hit the three dots to the lower right of your picture and select "edit". #seriouslycool

Side Note: Instagram allows up to 30 tags per post—that includes tags in your captions and those you use in subsequent comments. Use those hashtags liberally to get your photos in front of more people—or more judiciously to get them in front of the right people. Instagram culture lets you use lots of hashtags and still keep your social cred intact.

Facebook changes

Group users get dedicated app

You already know that Facebook Groups are great hubs for Manitoba teachers with the same interests. You've likely got education, travel and sports group faves of your own. Until now, though, you've had to access them through your main Facebook app. Enter the brand new Facebook Groups app. It puts all of your groups in one place so you can monitor and post much more easily. Combine ease of navigation with some pretty accurate suggestions on groups you may want to join, and you have one great space on your device to make connections.

Save posts from your news feed

Forget liking all those news feed posts you want to read later. Facebook now has a 'save' feature. Click on the top right corner of any post you see in your news feed—except your own—and choose save. No one will see your saved posts and you'll be able to find all of them in the 'saved' box in the left hand column right under your profile pic. This new feature only works for personal profiles, not Facebook pages.



Selfie with that shake?

Marketers these days always seem to know where your students are. Since September f'real, the company behind the DIY milkshake machines in many gas station convenience stores, has been asking kids to hashtag their selfies with #IMAFREALEBRITY. The goal? Get your selfie picked to show up on the machine's colour display—#picsonablender #freally?



Thank you teachers

for helping shape the **leaders of tomorrow.**



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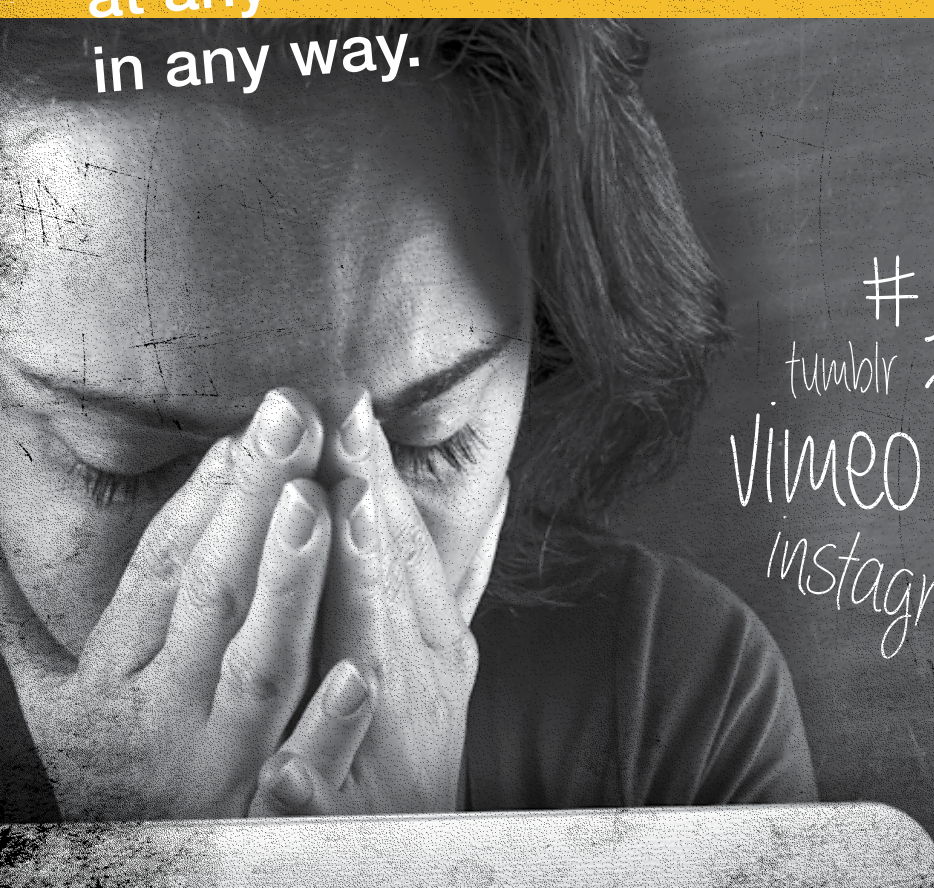
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CYBER

VIOLENCE

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