

School Libraries without Teacher- Librarians?

*An Open Letter to the TCDSB Trustees
by Kathy Amenta*

*In Defence of Teacher-Librarians
by John Pecsénye*

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School Violence and the Safe Schools Act

School violence terrifies parents, students and teachers alike. A caring society will do anything within its means to prevent incidents of harassment, assaults, intimidation or bullying in its community schools. So it was not surprising that in 2000 the Conservatives in Ontario introduced the Safe Schools Act. Boards were required to draw up policies that would complement the Safe Schools Act and the Toronto Catholic District School Board complied. On November 15, 2001 the Board adopted the Code of Conduct as an interim policy. The Ontario Safe Schools Act mandated automatic penalties for offences like bringing a weapon to school, the use of alcohol or drugs, assaults and swearing at a teacher to name a few. Some Boards adopted the phrase “zero tolerance” which is characterized as a no-nonsense approach to curb violence. Some jurisdictions have even incorporated the term directly into their policies and procedures.

It is rather hard to nail down precisely what zero tolerance means. In its purest form, it is an enforcement strategy that punishes all offences consistently and severely. The theory is that if people see that consequences are swift, sure and harsh - suspension or expulsion - they'll follow the rules. However, this hasn't precluded principals from interpreting the Safe Schools Act the Code of Conduct Policy differently. Most would agree that the use of thoughtful, multi-faceted approaches to dealing with behavioural issues in the teaching environment is paramount for ensuring everyone's safety. Principals may consider applying 'mitigating' factors to diminish the prescribed consequences for inappropriate or violent behaviours.

No single measure or policy can guarantee success. We, as educators, can-

not and will not tolerate intimidation, harassment or violent behaviour, and we will always deal with it using sensible and consistent responses. From the day the children enter school until the day they graduate, we as a society have to teach children to peacefully co-exist with one another. We have a responsibility to make certain that the educational environment is safe for all, even if it means the temporary or, in extreme circumstances, the permanent removal of individuals who cause physical and/or emotional harm to others. We, as teachers, have to educate their minds and, in conjunction with the parents, we are also charged with educating their hearts.

In July, of this year, the Ontario Human Rights Commission initiated a complaint against the Ministry of Education and the Toronto District School Board, alleging that the application of the Safe Schools Act and related school discipline policies is having a disproportional impact on racial minority students and students with disabilities. The Commission stated that it certainly supports the objectives of ensuring schools are safe; it went on to say that disciplinary measures must be fair, effective and non-discriminatory.

“No one disagrees that schools should be safe and free of violence, and reasonable people can disagree how that can best be achieved, but from a human rights perspective, a number of concerns have been raised about the *Safe Schools Act* and school board policies, which may be summarized as follows.

First, the Ministry of Education and school boards are giving two contradictory messages to school administrators and the general public. As a result, while some school administrators may apply the mitigating factors, others may prac-

tice zero tolerance. A practice of zero tolerance inevitably conflicts with anti-discrimination legislation, particularly if it targets disability-related behaviour.

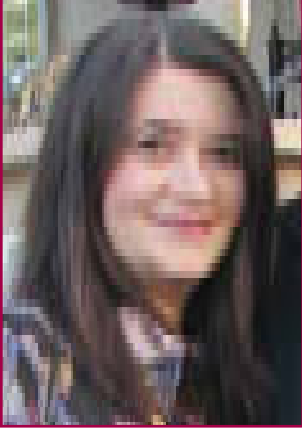
Second, although the Ministry of Education and school boards have acknowledged and addressed, to some extent, the possibility that the application of discipline may have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities, there has been strong resistance to acknowledging or addressing the possible disproportionate impact on racial minority students.

Third, in the GTA and other parts of Ontario, there is a strong perception supported by some empirical evidence that the *Act* and school board policies are having a disproportionate impact on racial minority students, particularly Black students, and students with disabilities.

Finally, human rights protections have not been adequately incorporated into the current disciplinary regime. It is possible to have a disciplinary regime that both maintains safe and violence-free schools and protects the human rights of all students in the school system.”

The Safe Schools Act and the TCDSB's Code of Conduct are two important pillars in our publicly funded school system. We are often reminded that the child's learning environment is paramount to that child's success. I cannot agree more. Enforce the policy and the act. All stakeholders have a moral obligation to offer alternative programming for those children in need. Fund those programmes sufficiently not to ensure their success but the success of the child.

John Pecsénye is the President of the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers.



Welcome

As the first term comes to an end, and Christmas approaches, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of our new members in this our first issue of Metro Voice for 2005-2006.

As the new editor of the Metro Voice, I look forward to serving you in this role and working with the Communications Chair, Mario Bernardo, in making this publication an integral communication vehicle for TECT members. The committee is planning to publish one issue in each term. Members are encouraged to make themselves heard by submitting articles, letters to the editor, or other pieces of writing. The Communications committee fundamentally believes that the Metro Voice must be your Voice if it is to be relevant and vibrant.

Bullying in the Workplace

Bullying is a growing concern in our schools. As teachers, we focus on the actions of our students. However, we need to be aware that bullying occurs amongst all members of our school community.

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), the Ontario Secondary Teachers Association (OSSTF) and the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) recently conducted a survey regarding bullying of their members. Bullying is defined as persistent, or repeated, incidents of abuse, threats, insults or humiliation that are intended to hurt other individuals physically, emotionally, psychologically or socially. This research shows that over one half of Ontario teachers have been bullied during their careers.

For teachers, being bullied by students is the most prevalent form of bullying. Thirty-eight percent of teachers in Ontario report having been bullied by their students.

The second most common type of bullying reported by teachers is that instigated by parents. Elementary teachers are more likely to be bullied by parents than secondary teachers. Research shows that thirty-six percent of elementary teachers report having been bullied by parents. Teachers in the junior grades have the highest incidence of being bullied by a parent – thirty-nine percent, followed by intermediate teachers at thirty-five percent.

The third most prevalent form of bullying is that carried out by a superordinate. In Toronto, twenty-six percent of teachers report having been bullied by a superordinate.

The fourth most commonly reported type of bullying reported by teachers was between colleagues.

Finally, in the city of Toronto, twenty percent of teachers reported being bullied by a colleague. (For the complete survey, please see www.oecta.on.ca.)

Bullying causes serious emotional distress both in the short and the long term. The effects of bullying on teachers are detrimental and should not be tolerated by anyone. It is upsetting that twenty-six percent of our colleagues report being bullied by a superior. The TCDSB website states:

“Our Catholic faith calls us to live together as a community and to love one another.

Bullying, in any form, runs counter to Christ’s message of inclusion and His instruction that we treat one another with care and respect.”

OECTA and OSSTF have stated that since bullying can occur in any workplace, Ontario’s Employment Standards Act should be amended to mirror the innovative sections 81.18 to 81.20 of Quebec’s Labour Standards Act that protects all workers against bullying or psychological harassment. The Quebec legislation defines psychological harassment as “any vexatious behaviour in the form of repeated and hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures that affect an employee’s dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that results in a harmful work environment for the employee.”

Both OECTA and OSSTF went on to say that they also want bullying recognized as a workplace hazard in the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

New research shows that bullying by a superior is the most damaging form of harassment. The survey found that teachers who were bullied by their superiors left their jobs at four times the rate of others who were bullied by parents, colleagues or students. Thirty-six percent of those who have been bullied by superiors have not mentioned it to anyone.

If you believe you are being bullied, please call the TECT office. We must work together to ensure a safe and healthy school environment.

Season’s Greetings

During this blessed season of Advent, let us reflect on the fundamental event we as a Catholic community share at this time and all things that come from the birth of our Saviour. For us this is a time of prayer, reflection and much joy. I wish for all of you, and your loved ones, all the blessings that flow from our Lord and much happiness during this Christmas season.

Louisa DeCiantis is the Third Vice-President of the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers and the Editor of the Metro Voice.



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An Open Letter to the TCDSB Trustees

On Thursday, November 3, 2005 the TCDSB Board of Trustees passed a motion directing senior staff to, “come

back with a report addressing the need to keep our libraries open full-time using library technicians.” TECT’s response was immediate. Trustees were made aware of TECT’s opposition to any initiative that would see an expansion of library services without a commitment to also expand the number of teacher-librarian positions. Further, a letter was sent to the Director of Education indicating that any attempt to eliminate any teacher-librarian positions would be met with an immediate grievance. On November 17th, the Board of Trustees met again to discuss the teacher-librarian issue. Frustrated by trustee comments quoted in the Toronto Star, and comments made during the trustee deliberations that evening, Kathy Amenta was moved to write the following Open Letter to the TCDSB.

Now in my 29th year of teaching for the board, I’ve been seriously thinking about retirement lately. My father also worked for this board. A janitor for thirty years, he taught me an important lesson: it’s a wonderful thing to be respected for doing your best in what you do.

As a teacher, I have followed my father’s example by always doing my best for the children - taking these precious little gems that were entrusted to me, and polishing them to their utmost brilliance. In fact, when a principal offered me the largest class she had with the entire school’s students in it, I eagerly accepted my first class, and over the years did the same at other schools.

So busy was I with that huge class, I did not even notice its walls were buckling under outside forces. I actually believed that what occurred inside those walls was all that mattered. Politics was for politicians, not for me.

My husband likes to tease me about being a slow learner because it has taken me a very long time to learn that education has a great deal to do with politics, and often little to do with children. But I now see clearly that if someone with my qualifications – with honours and teaching degrees, several specialist qualifications and countless additional courses; wide experience in curriculum coordination and involvement in reading/literacy associations; and connections with authors and publishers – if I can be replaced by someone who isn’t even a teacher, what else am I to think? I hate to admit it but my husband is right.

After almost thirty years, and since attending a board meeting on November 17th this year, I finally realize that power, politics and money play surprisingly dominant roles at the board level. If this were not the case, we would no longer be reeling from the harshness of the Harris years. We would

be working eagerly with the new education minister, not to continue the Harris legacy, but to restore what now seem our glory days.

Yes, those were the days, my friends. When teachers like me were considered to be on the cutting edge of literacy, curriculum and information retrieval. Distant memories are all I have of the days when we offered activities such as Literary Conferences for students, Multicultural Celebrations, Fairy-Tale Festivals, Family Reading Nights, Teddy Bear Picnics and French Cafés. Gone is the networking with outside institutions and experts like the Public Library and local authors. Gone too, are the contacts with my peers and library association, at least in our board.

My classroom continues to be starved as literacy resources go elsewhere. Visitors exude with admiration for what I have managed to preserve of my class, but I see it only as a shadow of its former self. Meanwhile, my peers have become “point-somethings” scattered on a contract page. Their classes have become warehouses for dated materials no one wants, and the best has been “borrowed” forever by no-name faces.

In a word, we have been robbed. From being a valuable “Partner in Action”, then a “Cover Girl”, I am now made to feel like a “Prep-Time” Machine.

You will have gathered by now that, to paraphrase a popular beer commercial, “I...am...a Teacher-Librarian”! But even as I write this with faint pride, I have the painful realization that there are many students in our board who have never had the opportunity to participate in the kind of programs I once offered through my library. And there are many teachers who have not had the opportunity to team-teach and collaborate with a teacher-librarian, as I was privileged to do for many years with scores of dedicated teachers. What a shame!

Yes, as far as I am concerned, the glory days are gone. Well-used, hobbled and humbled, I face an uncertain future as you, my trustees, consider replacing me with a library technician.

You say this is necessary because all children should have access to all-day library services. But you forget that it was you or your predecessors who halved and quartered library programs. And in your rush now to treat all children fairly, you have forgotten what a library program can offer in addition to basic facilities and services like lending books and providing computer assistance. You are treating them fairly all right, by denying all of them the enrichment that only quality programs will provide. An apple is not an orange.

Indeed, if you are concerned about fairness, please answer these questions: Why does a school like St. Maria Goretti, which is twice the size of a school of 550 pupils, always receive the same staffing in the library? Since the children in the bigger

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

“What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks about education.”

*Harold Howe,
former U.S. Commissioner of Education*

“There is a significant body of research that demonstrates that a qualified teacher-librarian (media specialist) has a positive impact on school culture and student achievement. Indeed, several studies have been established that teachers collaborate more in schools with a teacher-librarian and students read more, enjoy reading more, write better, access and use information more effectively and excel in academic content areas.”

*Ken Haycock, 1996.
“Competencies for Teacher-Librarians in the 21st Century,”
Teacher-Librarian, February, 1996.*

“A school-wide commitment to resource-based learning and literature-based reading programs creates a need for collaboration. Teachers in such programs see the need for their students to use the teacher-librarian’s expertise in literature and information literacy. When teacher-librarians and classroom teachers collaborate and share common goals, planning and instruction to provide authentic learning experiences for students, the opportunities for students to become readers who are able to access, evaluate and apply what they read will be greatly enhanced.”

*Kay Bishop and Nancy Larimer.
“Literacy through Collaboration,”
Teacher-Librarian, October, 1999, pp. 15-17.*

“In schools with good resource centers and the services of a teacher-librarian, students perform significantly better on tests for basic research skills. The evidence is similarly clear that more reading is done where there is a school library and a teacher-librarian.”

*Ken Haycock, 1996.
“Competencies for Teacher-Librarians in the 21st Century,”
Teacher-Librarian, February, 1996.*

school are being shortchanged a librarian, are you being “fair” to them? As the library programs in our schools have withered, where were all the literacy champions, let alone the library/language coordinators, the superintendents and the principals? Who spoke for the children then? I’m embarrassed to say this, but where was I, and where was my teachers’ association? And for that matter, where were you, my trustees?

Okay, so we were all shell-shocked by the Harris gang! But he’s now gone, and you still seem so busy with your high-level politicking that you haven’t had the time to find out what we actually do on the ground. Some of you even assume that we just shelve books, which you consider an insult to us. But I tell you that even my SK pupils, who eagerly shelve their own books, the older children who shelve books to earn community hours, and the co-op students who shelve books for their course credits...all of them know better. The real insult is that you now propose to shelve me! Who’s next on the hit list?

Let me be clear. We need library technicians like we need teacher aides, guidance teachers, speech, art and music teachers. We need all of them, and more, because we know it takes a village...

Nevertheless, at the November 17th meeting, you considered replacing us with technicians rather than hiring them to work alongside us. This is not progress.

You justify eliminating teacher-librarians with the phrase: “for the good of the children”. Meanwhile, you ignore not only what our programs have contributed over the years, but also what research shows about student achievement and libraries. You disregard what surrounding boards are doing, and you even belie your commitment to literacy. Rather than hire specialists to help solve prep-time issues, you focus on hiring technicians to save money and balance your budget.

So, I ask you, how will library technicians continue with the quality programs I used to run? How can a technician teach a lesson incorporating academic and moral considerations while following the spirit of Catholicity...if I still get butterflies in my stomach when I try to do this as a seasoned professional? Please don’t tell me that the classroom teachers will do this when they accompany their classes to the library, unless you plan to deprive them of their prep time! No, my guess is that when students ask a question in the absence of their teacher – about “sex” for example – a technician can always refer them to the reference books or, the audio-visual section, or better yet, the internet.

Enough. For almost thirty years, I have polished these little gems to make them gleam. I’ve even used my own rags, taken the time and energy, and loved them as my own. It is for their sake that I say to you, with due respect, that you are profoundly mistaken.

Just as an apple is not an orange, a service is not a program.

For you, it may be about “turf wars”, politics, power and money. For me, it is all about children.

But then, I’m naïve. Retirement is looking better every day.

Kathy Amenta is a Teacher-Librarian at St. Maria Goretti Catholic School

Letter to the Editor

On November 16, 2005, in an article entitled, "Board mulls axing teacher-librarians", Toronto Star Education Reporter Tess Kalinowski, reported:

"The Toronto Catholic school board is considering the elimination of its elementary teacher-librarians. It's a move some trustees say could allow them to keep more school libraries open for greater periods of time by hiring less costly library technicians."

In her article, Kalinowski also made reference to specific comments made by Trustee John Del Grande on the issue of teacher-librarians. According to the article:

Trustee John Del Grande said he supports teacher-librarians in high schools, where they're needed to help students with research and keep the library open so pupils can use it during study periods. In elementary schools, however, students don't have spares and tend to use the library when their class teacher is present.

"The technicians are more than qualified to teach the kids research skills and maintain libraries," he said.

"To pay someone qualified to be a teacher to put away library books is almost an insult to their skills levels," he said.

Trustee Del Grande's comments provoked a pretty strong reaction amongst many of our members and especially amongst our teacher-librarians.

Needless to say, the trustee's comments also prompted an immediate response from the Association.

The letter that follows was written by John Pecsenye, and was submitted to the Toronto Star on November 17, 2005. While the Star did not publish it in its Letters to the Editor section, it is reprinted here to counter some of the comments and views that were quoted and expressed in the Kalinowski piece.

Letter to the Editor In Defense of Teacher-Librarians

There appear to be two distinct views developing between the two publicly funded school boards in Toronto as to how to improve student literacy.

The Toronto District School Board hired an additional 65 qualified teacher-librarians while the Toronto Catholic District School Board contemplates the total elimination of teacher-librarians and replacing them with library-technicians.

Trustee Del Grande stated, it's an insult, "To pay someone qualified to be a teacher to put away library books." The real insult is that a trustee for the Toronto Catholic District School Board would reveal his ignorance, and denigrate the role of teacher-librarians, by making such an uninformed comment. The role of teacher-librarians in any school system is far more complex and requires specific skill sets that only qualified teacher-librarians possess.

Mr. Del Grande states that he is in favour of teacher-librarians in high schools, where they are needed to develop research skills. I would ask Mr. Del Grande whether he believes that the development of these skills should begin at the high school. I would suggest that Mr. Del Grande avail himself of the use of his local school library and read the research. The foundation for these skills must begin long before a student enters a high school. A fostering of the love of reading and the appreciation of the written word begins in the elementary schools. There is no magic awakening that takes place when a student enters the doors of his/her local high school.

I find it ironic that at a time when the Toronto Catholic District School Board has identified literacy improvement as a primary objective it would even contemplate the idea of de-professionalizing the role of the teacher-librarian in our schools.

After having spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on an advertising campaign to lure students from the Toronto District School Board, I find it equally ironic that our Board, in an attempt to save money, would turn around and reduce the quality of library services being offered to its students. Ironic because while our Board considers reducing the number of teacher-librarians, the Toronto District School Board, the Board with which it is competing, is increasing its teacher-librarian contingent.

John Pecsenye is the President of the Toronto Elementary
Catholic Teachers

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

On Thursday, November 3, 2005, during the Board's monthly Human Resources, Program and Religious Affairs Committee meeting, the Board of Trustees passed the following motion:

"That staff be directed to come back with a report addressing the need to keep our libraries open full time using Library Technicians."

There was a recorded vote requested and the following are the votes cast by those trustees present:

In Favour	Opposed
Ann Andrachuk	Mary Cicogna
Oliver Carrol	Catherine Leblanc-Miller
John Del Grande	Joseph Martino
Angela Kennedy	Maria Rizzo
Barbara Poplawski	

Homework Websites Encourage Laziness

The following article appeared in the Toronto Star on Monday, October 24, 2005. It has been reprinted here with permission from the author.

Most parents would not want to see their 12-year-old with training wheels or their 15-year-old wearing water wings. Yet homework websites offer students precisely the same kind of artificial support, and parents should be wary of how, and how often, such sites are used.

I didn't know such a beast existed until our local trustee showed up at a parent council meeting to say the Toronto Catholic board would be launching a site so that kids — and parents — could keep track of assignments.

The move is in keeping with many American schools, some local private schools and individual schools in boards throughout the GTA.

Before anyone other than my children accuses me of being a crotchety old-timer, I am no homework ogre. For example, if you are sick enough to miss a day of school, I think homework can wait until you feel better.

I also do not belong to the camp that believes in homework for homework's sake. I've known far too many parents who value volume over purpose. Homework was never meant to be after-school busy work. It should include any work left over from the school day, as well as exercises to reinforce key facts and formulae, bolster building blocks for later, more complicated work.

A parent's homework role is to ensure there is a quiet space to work and enough time to finish off anything sent home. You can offer advice, act as an audience, drive to the library or ante up cash to buy supplies, but the day-to-day responsibility of keeping track should fall to your child almost as soon as he or she is old enough to bring

work home.

Posting assignments on the Internet offers students the chance to procrastinate because a safety net is in place. If they don't write it down at school, they can always catch up later. That instils a habit of task delay rather than task completion, an approach to life that won't hold up in the workplace. Imagine calling your boss at home after hours because you didn't bother to find out at work what's up for the next day.

As for parental involvement, there comes a time in all students' lives when parents have to back off. Returning to the workplace model, the only thing worse than calling your boss after hours to check on your next day's assignment would be to have your mother do it for you.

When our children were in the primary grades, we were routinely sent home careful printed instructions for any long-term assignment or project. Operating on the 10 minutes per grade rule of thumb, there usually wasn't so much daily work assigned that they couldn't simply remember it.

The primary grades are a time to nail the basics. Learning to follow up on work is one of them. Not everyone will complete everything immediately, but the early years offer the luxury of trial and error time to nail this vital skill. Forgetting to study for a Grade 2 spelling test isn't the same as not studying for Grade 12 calculus. By Grade 3, many students are given quite elaborate day planners. Homework is entered into the book directly from the homework board, often during a dedicated time slot.

When trouble occurs, it's common practice for both teacher and parents to sign off to ensure work is written down at school and then completed at home. Still, I've known many parents who have pulled their hair out over

incomplete homework. Almost always, however, the only solution, as tough as it sounds, is to let kids experience the consequences. The sooner they learn they don't like the look of a lousy mark, the more likely they are to attempt to pull up their socks. Continue to bail them out, and they simply will never accept responsibility and consequences.

Another troubling fact is that homework websites are a middle-class luxury, furthering the gulf between computer-rich families and those who opt not to buy — or simply can't afford — computer and Internet access. In the pre-Internet dark ages, many of us used to take the social route out, calling a friend to get caught up as needed. Relying on the Internet means accepting the possibility of system crashes and even the possibility of hackers posting bogus homework.

In the hectic, over-scheduled world our kids live in, school often gets squeezed between hockey practices and exotic vacations south. Maybe it's time to realign our parental priorities to ensure more emphasis is placed on schoolwork first, as opposed to presenting it as a chore that needs to be done after all the other activities.

There'll likely be more than a few times my own kids will scurry to the computer to see if they can track down a missing assignment. But if and when they do, I'm ready to play bad cop, reminding them a homework website is about as valuable as a Get Out of Jail Free card from Monopoly, and should be used about as often.

Catherine Mulroney is a Toronto journalist, author and mother of four. Her column, "The Minivan Years" appears in the Toronto Star twice monthly.

Farewell Teachers...

It was the early to mid seventies when you finished your education and were ready to embark on a new career. Richard Nixon was being impeached, Pierre Trudeau was changing the face of Canada and you were beginning to teach the first of many students with the Metro Separate School Board (now TCDSB). Throughout the next 30 to 35 years, you saw changes in provincial governments, and their effects on our education system, with policies such as Bill Davis' full funding for Catholic education, Bob Rae's Common Curriculum, and the Mike Harris "Common Sense Revolution." During this climate of change, the constant vari-

ables were always the students you taught. Students, who are now making their mark in society, will remember the teachers who spent countless hours with them, teaching, counselling and taking time to just listen to them.

We salute your many contributions to education, and we wish you health and self-fulfillment in your new life beyond teaching. God bless you all.

Rosemary Moran is a teacher at St. Helen and a member of the Communications Committee.



Madeleine Aldridge



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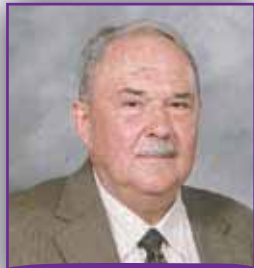
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Gloria Nazar



Dan Nazar



Marianne Nazimek



Elizabeth Nelson



Paul O'Connor



Nancy Pevcevicus



Joseph Pierotti



Karen Rolston



Antonina Schembri



Luba Sklierenko



Barbara Sled



Mary Sullivan-Tate



Donatella Tiberio-Smith



Michele Trafford



Ernest Ungaro



Linda Vachon



Jeanne Vandall



Christina Walters



Angela Waugh



Louise Wright



Margaret Wynarchuk

Also Retiring in 2005

Murchison Amoroso
Krystyna Baichoo
Mary Bailey
Myrna Beausoleil
James Benton
Shirley Brown
Glen Burke
Marie Calderone
Rosetta Calderone
Barbara Carroll
Pasquale Celli
Henry Czarnota
Silvana De Boer
Corradino Doret
Lorraine Dupuis
Anita Eagle
Elisa Evangelista
Rosemary Faludi
Christine Gagnon
Florence Gillis

Georgina Gough
Peggy Greb
Maria Grunewald
Wanda Guluzian
Margaret Harding
Mary Harris
Agnes Hoogeveen
Connie Iskric
Mary Jo Johnston
Linda King
Teresa Koch
Therese Laphen
Beverley Lodenquai
Yvonne Lopes
Rosalyn Luchini
Marion Ludlow
Nicole Marion-Game
Rita Mayer
Janet McCarthy
Jan Meschino

Colleen O'Marra
Olga Piruckyj
Marie Plourde
Catherine Prebble
Catherine Proietti
Vicky Ronco
Maria Senior
Olga Shumsky
Alexandra Stepura
Raymonde Taillefer
Helen Volk
Maureen Walders
Charles Walther
Anne Wasiuta
Emilia Yolanda Whyte
Mary Wilson
Trevor Wilson
Vera Zalucky

TECT 2004-2005 Award Winners

The Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers Awards dinner was held on Thursday, September 15, 2005 at the Days Hotel. TECT honoured the 2004-2005 award recipients. Congratulations to the winners and special thanks to all of the nominators for taking the time to recognize the outstanding achievement of your peers.

Ana Goncalves
Outstanding Educator



Ana Goncalves (left), Nominator - Sharlene Richardson, and John Pecsenye

Terri Taggart
*Outstanding Involvement in
OECTA*



L to R: Nominator - Mary Egan, Awards Committee Chair - Mary Edwards, Terri Taggart, Nominator - Carol Soloman

Noel Martin
Honourary Membership



Joan Daly Martin and son Timothy accepted the Honourary Membership award on behalf of Noel Martin.

Mary Jane Ricci
*Etobicoke/York
Association Representative*



Mario Addesa
*North York
Association Representative*



Andrea Morrison
*Toronto / East York
Association Representative*



Joan Guenther
Life Membership

The TECT Awards Committee has distributed nomination forms for the 2005-2006 awards. Additional nomination forms are available from your Association Representative or on our website at www.tect.org. Please send your nominations to Mary Edwards c/o TECT

At TECT's annual Awards Dinner, on September 15, 2005, Dan Nazar was recognized and honoured for his outstanding service as an Association Representative in Scarborough. A frequent contributor to the Metro Voice, it seems only fitting that his parting remarks should grace its pages one last time.

Good evening.
I'd like to begin by saying a special thank you to Julie Altomare-DiNunzio who nominated me for this award. I am humbled by the kind things she said. I am also surprised that she could find such nice things to say even though she only knew me for the one year we taught together. I would have enjoyed more time teaching collaboratively in the same school.

As I have just retired, this seems like a bizarre episode of "Survivor": I leave the island, and then I get an award.

A long, long time ago, I was a student in the MSSB from JK until Grade 13. I began life as a teacher with some occasional work at Neil McNeil High School in 1970-71 while still attending university. For many decades the Board and its schools felt like home; its staff like family.

Both from the Province and from the general public as well, some disagreements notwithstanding, there was a genuine respect for us teachers and for what we did.

While the vocational aspects of this profession have remained true, society began to change with the "me-first-greed" of the 1980's and the "I've-got-mine, circle-the-wagons" philosophy of the 1990's. Mike Harris' "Non-Sense Revolution" helped to contaminate the atmosphere of understanding at all levels of government. In the Ontario of my youth, there was a strong sense of "we're-all-in-this-together". However, this well-known philosophy morphed into the mantra of pseudo-accountability. Blaming others for society's ills became the first order of the day instead of dealing constructively with the ongoing challenges of living in a communal society.

I have been the TECT Rep for part or all of my term at each of the schools I have taught at full-time starting back in 1975-76. That's probably at least 25 years in total. I believe that in that time I have seen the OECTA Metro Unit evolve from its chief function of maintaining the contractual bridge between teachers and their partners in education. We used to have the members of the Secondary Panel as our association sisters and brothers. The principals were part of us too. The annual gatherings at the Royal York Hotel represented quite a cross-section of the educators at all levels of the MSSB.

And now we are TECT, the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers. In my view our union has become more of a protector of teachers' rights and an advocate for teachers' professionalism. TECT genuinely cares about its members. That is due in no small part to the myriad unit

and sub-unit executive members and volunteers that we have had over the years, to all the people who have cared enough to stand in for their staffs as Staff Reps, and to all who have spoken up at our meetings.

During these decades of change, I had come to feel less and less that sense I spoke of earlier of being "at home" with the Board. In this period, TECT has adapted itself in the face of crisis and difficulty to serve the members in more wide-ranging, sophisticated, and pro-active ways. The sense of "home" now resides much more in my fellowship with TECT. This is due in part because the people at TECT care about what I think and want to hear what I have to say.

There is a most appropriate quote from the poem Making Contact by Virginia Satir:

I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen by them, heard by them, to be understood, and touched by them.

The greatest gift I can give is to see, hear, understand, and to touch another person.

When this is done, I feel contact has been made.

As an Association Representative, I have always been very proud to be "in the trenches" with my fellow teachers. Any good organization, or movement, depends on its foot-soldiers as much as on its leaders. I look back with great pride and fondness on walking enthusiastically side-by-side with my colleagues when times were tough. It has been one of the great honours of my life to have served as an Association Representative alongside so many good people.

Thank you for this evening's additional honour.

Dan Nazar retired from teaching in June 2005. He was a teacher at St. Rene Goupil.



Dan Nazar receives his award from Julie Altomare-DiNunzio and John Pecsénye.

REPORT OF THE LONG TERM DISABILITY CHAIR

Rose Marie Grycaj presented this overview of the LTD plan in a speech at TECT's Association Representatives' Conference on September 15, 2005.

The teachers of the Toronto Elementary Unit and the Toronto Secondary Unit of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association have a long-term disability plan that is a group benefit managed by the teachers. (This group benefit is not a TCDSB benefit.)

It is extremely important for a teacher experiencing medical/emotional difficulties to be under the care of an appropriate specialist. At the beginning of an illness, it may not seem obvious that one will be off of work for an extended period of time. Further, one may feel most comfortable under the care of the family physician. However, for a claim to be approved by an insurance company, it is mandatory for the individual to have appropriate care and treatment and this usually means being under the care of a specialist.

If a teacher is ill and using sick days to gain income during their illness, it is most important for the teacher to call the Long-Term Disability office at the earliest opportunity. There are strict time lines to file a claim with an insurance company. The Long-Term Disability office is the best resource for teachers to discuss their options and get the appropriate information in order to make the best decisions during the "mandatory elimination period". This is the 120 consecutive calendar-day period that the teacher must be seen by a doctor to be totally disabled from their own occupation as a teacher.

If a teacher has medical support to file a claim with the insurance company but does not have enough sick days to get through the 120 consecutive calendar day period, the teacher may be entitled to benefits under Employment Insurance.

A package of information and forms will be sent to the teacher from the Long-Term Disability office when the teacher calls and makes the request to file a Long-Term Disability claim. It is in the teacher's best interest to get the information from the Long-Term Disability office as soon as possible in the claim process as there are numerous claims to complete. The attending physician's statement is usually the form that takes the longest time. Teachers must be prepared to become advocates to get forms completed in a more than just timely manner.

For information about medical, personal, parental leaves

of absence, teachers are encouraged to call their respective units for advice.

When all the forms are complete and the appropriate forms are forwarded to the insurance company, the claim becomes an open claim. If there is sufficient and clear medical to support the claim, the claim should be approved. If the medical going forward is not clear, the insurance company will write to the doctors listed for more clarification. The insurance company can only determine the claim based on objective medical and must ascertain that the teacher meets the definition of total disability as per the contract that the Teachers and the Great-West Life Assurance Company have.

If a claim is denied, the teacher has the right to appeal the decision. The first level of appeal is a personal appeal. If this personal appeal is denied, the teacher has the right to have Provincial OECTA review the file and litigate it if legal opinion is such that there is sufficient medical to support a legitimate claim. Members reading this must remember that all of the steps outlined in this article take time and members are encouraged to seek advice from release officers in the union office and the LTD office.

For approved disability claims on or after January 1, 2005, the benefit level is 55% of gross salary, tax-free.

While on LTD, the member is responsible for the cost to maintain TCDSB benefits of extended health, dental, and life insurance. Members should understand that if they choose to give up their benefits while on a leave, benefits will not be reinstated by the TCDSB until the member returns to active employment with the board.

Rose Marie's speech has been re-printed here to provide a general overview of the Long Term Disability Plan. It is not meant to be all encompassing or definitive. Members are encouraged to call the LTD office for specifics about their own situation as no two cases are the same. Rose Marie can be reached at the LTD office at (416) 398-6583.



*Rose Marie Grycaj
is the Chair of the Long
Term Disability Plan*

Reps Conference



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON TECT'S TEACHER FORUMS

The Special Education Forum

TECT announces that it will host a Special Education Forum...and special education teachers came.

Eighty-four special education teachers left the TECT office that night thinking, talking, sharing and believing. I was one of them. The forum created a framework for teachers to come together as a professional learning community. They came together to be heard, to be understood, and to be part of a collective and share best practices and evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and school board initiatives for children with special needs. They shared experiences, both positive and negative, and took ownership over building a commitment to accountability.

The forum created an environment where teachers felt empowered to partake in the re-culturing of schools and the development of a shared vision based on best practices. They even committed to ongoing dialogue and volunteered to develop a questionnaire to better understand the complex working conditions of our members.

Teachers have an obligation to look at both the positive and negative faces of "change" and move in a direction that builds on the belief that all children have "special" needs and create learning environments where children experience maximum success and teachers are supported and appreciated.

It has been said that "substantive change resides at the teacher level among professionals and others who care about the school students". If this is in fact true, we – teachers – collectively, have a golden opportunity to create school environments that work and teach the whole child - the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive.

If we, as teachers, build a commitment towards a vision, it will take patience, courage and on-going communication

to achieve it. The special education forum set the stage for future dialogue.

The forum might be over, but the discussion and energy continues. The seeds have been planted and, with nurturing, the tree will grow. I left, thinking about a passage written by Jann Arden. She writes:

"I felt lighter somehow, walking the rest of the way home. Everything was so clear. It was so quiet. I was in slow motion counting breaths. Cars went by silently. There was no wind, no sky, just clouds under my feet and a feeling of well being. Helping others is a reward bigger than one often imagines."

The FSL Forum

It was French wine, croissants, and teachers sinking their teeth into pastries that differentiated the two forums. Oh...and ...the melodic sounds of teachers speaking French. Their conversations reminded me of my stay in Paris and the visits to the Musée du Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, L'Institut du Monde Arabe and Musée national d'Art Moderne which were among my favorites. I remember sipping lattes and admiring artists from around the world painting at Montmartre and watching the city light up from the top of the Eiffel Tower. The people, the markets, the smell of perfume – Cartier and Chanel, the cheese, the fashion and overall hustle and bustle on the city streets makes Paris, to borrow the words of the French writer Honore de Balzac, "an undiscovered place, an unknown retreat."

WAKE UP BRUNO! ... FSL.... Forum.... Oh yes! It was great! FSL teachers gathered in large numbers for the first of several forums that TECT will host. They participated in an "open-microphone" forum and discussed FSL services in a professional and proactive

manner. The FSL teachers addressed many issues and they creatively and resourcefully proposed excellent solutions. I sat and listened to their pleas and better understood their concerns. What was clear was their love for children and their passion to teach.

FSL teachers are a lively bunch. They laughed, they listened and they overwhelmingly volunteered to continue dialoguing with each other and with TECT. Their issues are real. They live them every working day. I teach my four year olds to STOP, LOOK and LISTEN... a lesson we should always remind ourselves of. Thanks FSL teachers. I learned a lot.

TECT would like to thank all those teachers who participated in the Forums. Your contributions are much appreciated. Your efforts will hopefully shape a better tomorrow.

At the November 2nd TECT Executive Meeting, the Executive passed the following action directive: "That the President write Judith Esser highlighting teacher concerns from the FSL forum and asking for a meeting to address these concerns." TECT is presently awaiting a response from the Board.

Bruno Pileggi is the Treasurer and Mario Addesa is a Councillor of the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers.





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*The Adoration of the Shepherds,
Jusepe deRibera*

Hope is Rekindled in His Heart

At Christmas, we will contemplate the great mystery of God made man in the Virgin Mary's womb. He was born in Bethlehem to share our frail human condition! He comes to dwell among us and brings salvation to the whole world. His mission will be to gather individuals and peoples into the one family of God's children. We can say that in the Mystery of Christmas we are granted to contemplate a "qualitative leap" in the history of salvation. Man who through sin distanced himself from the Creator is now offered the gift of new and full communion with him.

Thus, hope is rekindled in his heart, while the gates of paradise are re-opened to humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, the celebration of Christmas, now at hand, is a favourable opportunity for everyone to live more deeply the value and significance of the great event of Jesus' birth.

This is my hope for all of you.

*Pope John Paul II
December 22, 2004*



NEW TEACHERS DINNER

Sala Caboto – October 13, 2005

On Thursday, October 13, 2005 the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers held a dinner in honour of its new members at Sala Caboto. The event allowed new teachers to become familiar with OECTA while they enjoyed dinner and the company of colleagues. Our newest members also received gifts and prizes. TECT would like to thank Johnson Insurance for sponsoring the event and the Teacher Education/Policy and Procedures Committee for organizing such a successful evening.



Extracurricular Activities



Extracurricular activities have long been a part of a teacher's school experience. Teachers spend countless hours coaching teams, organizing Christmas concerts, or on other countless extracurricular activities. What is sometimes forgotten in this reality is that extracurricular activities are voluntary. Teachers participate in extracurricular activities out of the goodness of their hearts and in a selfless act of good will.

In this spirit of goodwill and selflessness, members sometimes forget certain realities when volunteering to take on extracurricular activities. Members often comment that they felt pressured to take on extracurricular activities. As release officers, we are often told that it is an expectation of the principal and that there are fears that failure to participate will result in a poor evaluation.

In reality, both the Board and TECT have long been in agreement that extracurricular activities are voluntary and outside the scope of evaluation. To emphasize this reality, the Board agreed to include the following wording in Article 11 of the Collective Agreement, "No teacher shall be disciplined, demoted, discharged or suspended based on evaluation related to optional Professional and Staff Development or any voluntary activity."

In other words, if you choose not to participate in extracurricular activities, you cannot be disciplined or have an evaluation detrimentally effected because of your individual choice to not participate. To put it bluntly, if you choose not to participate in extracurricular activities, "that is your business and nobody else's." The Board cannot question your decision. Just as some people donate to charities, your involvement in extracurricular is your

charity of choice. No one can force you to donate to a charity. No one can force you to participate in an extracurricular activity.

You should know that once you agree to participate in an extracurricular activity you may find yourself subject to parental and superordinate demands. Every year, as release officers, we hear of incidents where members are verbally harassed by parents for decisions relating to extracurricular activities. Every year we also hear from members whose decisions regarding an extracurricular activity are overruled or called into question by a superordinate.

Moreover, while an extracurricular activity is voluntary, a teacher who so engages is still subject to Board discipline and subject to the provisions of the Teaching Profession Act. If you criticize another teacher, during any extracurricular activity, you could find yourself in violation of 18 (1) (b) of the Teaching Profession Act. As well, you are not immune to Children's Aid investigations or police charges while involved in extracurricular activities. Therefore, always maintain a professional demeanour, whether on the practice field, at a tournament or during any extracurricular activity.

If all of this seems too much, remember an individual decision of non-participation will spare you the potential consequences that may arise from participation in voluntary extra-curricular activities. As an Association we cannot direct members one way or another. It is your choice.

Members often ask why classes are cancelled or students farmed out to allow members to participate in extracurricular activities. It is TECT's view that Occasional Teachers should be provided so as to ensure continuity of

programming and to avoid increasing the workload of other teachers. Prior to making a commitment to undertake extra-curricular activities, TECT advises members to discuss coverage arrangements with their principal. If your superordinate states that your classes will be cancelled or that the students will be farmed out, that should be part of your decision making process.

Since teachers give so much goodwill in terms of participating in extracurricular activities, the Board should also demonstrate goodwill. By providing Occasional Teachers, the Board acknowledges the goodwill of teachers, and creates an environment where a member's involvement in extracurricular activities does not result in a mandatory increase in the workload of colleagues.

No member who chooses to participate in a voluntary activity should see that goodwill impact negatively on other teachers. If you believe extracurricular activities are impacting negatively on you, or if you have comments regarding this issue, then TECT wants to hear from you.

TECT will be meeting with the Board to discuss these issues. In the meantime, TECT encourages teachers to reflect on the impact participation in voluntary extra-curricular activities have on themselves, their students and their colleagues.

*Anthony Bellissimo and Mario Bernardo
are the First and Second Vice-Presidents,
respectively, of the Toronto Elementary
Catholic Teachers.*

Important Collective Agreement Dates

JANUARY

- 1st Transfer Request Forms will be available for any teacher wishing to apply for an exchange transfer, an open transfer, job sharing, or transfer to part-time teaching by this date. *See Article 7*
- 1st Open Transfer Request Forms will be available in schools by this date. *See Article 7*
- 1st Application forms will be available for teachers wishing to participate in the Deferred Salary Plan for September 1, 2005. *See Article 18*
- 30th Human Resources must receive Category upgrading forms to qualify for retroactive pay to January 1st. *See Article 3*
- 31st Deadline date for Open transfer applications to be received by Human Resources. *See Article 7*

FEBRUARY

- 1st Applications for teachers interested in participating in the Deferred Salary Plan (Commencing September 2006) must be received by Human Resources. *See Article 18*

MARCH

- 1st Human Resources must receive proof of Qualifications by this date to qualify for retroactive pay to September 1st. *See Article 3*
- 1st Any teacher on a leave of absence that commenced before February 1 of the current school year, and who is due to return September 1 must notify the Human Resources Department by this date on the form which will be provided; or in writing if such has not been received by the teacher, of that teacher's intention to resume teaching or otherwise. *See Article 7.05*
- 1st All exchange transfer, open transfer, job sharing, or transfer to part-time teaching requests received by the Human Resources Department on or before March 1 will be compiled and the lists will be distributed

as appropriate to superintendents of education, principals and OECTA school representatives. *See Article 7.01 (b)*

- 10th Date by which Board must notify teachers who have requested an open transfer as to whether or not such request shall be granted. Teachers may not be advised of a specific placement until the end of the normal transfer process. *See Article 7.03*
- 15th The Teacher Co-Chair of the LSSAC must be given the following current information prior to the March meeting of LSSAC.
 - i) the projected enrolment for the coming school year
 - ii) the allocation based on that enrolment
 - iii) the current Form 100*See Article 5.07*
- 17th Deadline date for the principal to consult with the Local School Staffing Advisory Committee to discuss:
 - i) the projected enrolment for the coming school year
 - ii) the allocation based on that enrolment
 - iii) the organization of the school based on the above*See Article 9.01*
- 31st Open positions in a school's staffing model for the following school year shall be determined by this date. A list of these open positions shall be forwarded immediately to the Superintendents of Education. *See Article 7.10*

Mario Bernardo is the Second Vice-President of the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers.

Internet Library

www.thecanadianteacher.com

A great website with professional articles as well as inspirational stories and anecdotes. An amazing "Teacher Tools" section allows you to create seating plans, classroom forms, calendars and much more. The website also provides you with information to access over 800 teacher freebies! This is a website that every teacher should have on their "favourites" list.

www.linktolearning.com

This website links teachers to websites supporting the Ontario curriculum (K-8). Simply click on the subject area you are interested in and you are immediately linked to a vast number of websites you can use to support your program. While not all of the links are specific to Ontario, you won't leave this site disappointed.

www.canadiansafeschools.com

The Canadian Safe School Network (CSSN) is a national, charitable organization that focuses on reducing youth violence and making our schools and communities safer. This is an excellent resource for administrators, teachers, parents and students.

Gina Vincent is a Guidance Teacher-Counsellor in Scarborough

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