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Photo: Westisle Gymnasium filled to talk about the school review.

The Composition Conundrum

Dear Teachers, It is difficult to believe that we are more than halfway through another school year. I would like to begin by saying thank you for all that you do on a daily basis. My school visits and conversations with teachers constantly remind me that your job is becoming more and more difficult. Class size and composition are still some of the biggest issues affecting teacher workload, and I will continue to meet with government to address these concerns.

We are deeply saddened by the recent loss of two teachers, Kelli Seaward (Glen Stewart Primary) and Anna Howard (LM Montgomery). Anna and Kelli were both valued teachers and left behind a footprint of caring for students and wanting the best for their education. They will be dearly missed by their families, friends, colleagues and the students they taught and cared for each day.

Recently, I joined the NSTU for a demonstration at the Halifax Legislature to show support for Nova Scotia teachers in their fight to secure a collective agreement and to protect collective bargaining rights. Teachers are advocating for reforms to improve the learning conditions for their students, but their government has stripped them of this ability and has legislated a contract on teachers. It is a very trying time for our fellow educators. The following letter from a Nova Scotia colleague describes some of the devastation felt by NS teachers...

"Parents, please encourage your teachers. We are devastated and exhausted. Tomorrow, we still face large classes with little help. Tomorrow, we still face students who will act out violently and not have the supports to help. Tomorrow, your children will sit and wait for their teacher while they deal with paperwork and behaviors. No extra EAs have been hired to deal with children with major diagnosis and no support. Tomorrow, teachers will attend committee meetings that will fill up their time and only add to their stress. Tomorrow, teachers will continue to administer standardized testing that does not make any difference in students' lives or learning. It will continue to take years to get a child on a psych-ed list. It will continue to take moving mountains to get guidance help for students. Teachers will continue to do their best to fight, but it is difficult to fight after you have been beaten so badly.

Keep up the good fight, comrades."

We can empathize with NS teachers, as the existing needs in our classrooms would create a very similar list. Teachers try to make up for the deficiencies that exist in the classroom but the needs are becoming more diverse, and the demands on teachers are ever increasing. PEITF will continue to fight for improved working conditions, and we will continue to demand that students are provided the best possible learning environment and will have equal access to all educational services.

The ongoing review of schools by the Public Schools Branch continues to be the focal point for teachers, parents, students and communities across the Island. I have attended the school review meetings, and I have heard many excellent presentations and anecdotes, which have helped to reiterate the importance of our education system. As a Federation, we have also spent a great deal of time meeting with schools that may be impacted and hearing their concerns. These meetings provided us with insight on the challenges these proposed changes will have on individual schools. Schools and communities across the Island are demanding "Better Learning for All." We are hopeful that these changes will help to address teacher workload, class size, and class composition. Our primary concerns rest in how all schools are resourced as this ties closely with the workload and well-being of all teachers and ultimately, their students. We will continue to keep you updated throughout this ongoing process.

As stated in an article from Arne Duncan, "Educators frequently share that teaching is the most difficult job that anyone can have-and the most rewarding. Teachers are our nation builders-the strength of every profession in our country grows out of the knowledge and skills that teachers help to instill in our children!"

Thank you for all that you do for our children. As your president, I will continue to advocate for teachers and to be your voice in attaining the promise of "Better Learning for All".

Take care, Bethany MacLeod



Bethany MacLeod
President, PEITF

by Bethany MacLeod



Chad Gallant

The Alternate Fact of the Matter

I hate to admit it, but I am hooked. I thought it would pass in November, but it didn't. I thought it would subside in January, but it didn't. Here we are in March, and I still cannot turn away from the

circus happening south of the border. I am glued to the coverage of US politics. Unfortunately, you need a cynical eye to get through most stories' story...other times, you need a shovel.

As someone that has had many great teachers growing up that explored bias, I understand the need to explore other points of view prior to taking sides. Being someone that closely follows politics, I am also a bit of a cynic. Therefore, I try my best to balance the national and international news coverage I follow by cycling through, CBC, BBC, CNN, Fox News, and NPR News, amongst others. In doing this, it becomes obvious that each outlet tends to report through its own lens.

While initially learning the need to explore a story as a student, however, my access to information was much more limited then versus the information jungle which our students must navigate through today. Therein lies the importance of teachers and parents in raising media literate students that are

not ready to accept everything brought to them as fact.

This information comes at students from all sides. Whether it be through their Facebook feeds, advertisements, spam emails, Twitter accounts, Snapchat, You Tube videos, or Google search results; students are inundated with information. Quite often this information is not verified and is designed to generate revenue by enticing people into clicking on a story with alluring or controversial headlines (click here to look 20 years younger). It then gets shared by peers which adds further perceived credibility to the story and thus continues the chain. While the majority of these stories are designed for profit though ad clicks, many are designed to spread misinformation or even hate.

In today's classrooms, the task of teaching students to be critical consumers of information has become even more pronounced than ever. Students can no longer read with an acceptance of truth of what they have read or viewed, but instead need to be critical of everything they consume. Although it may be time consuming, it is important that students learn to crosscheck the information they come across. Far too often personal opinion is being mistaken for hard news as it gets presented online in a manner that blurs that line. A good website for fact checking many of the most trending international stories is Snopes.com.

An eye opening activity for many students is to view how a single event is covered through a variety of media outlets. Your students may be surprised by the difference in the tone in which some organizations cover the news. Students must learn to cut through the commentary and make their own judgments based on actual facts, not the "Alternate facts"....

For those interested in finding out more about media literacy, or would like some ideas or lesson plans on the topic, you may want to visit mediasmarts.ca. MediaSmarts (formerly known as Media Awareness Network) is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization for digital and media literacy. On the MediaSmarts website, you will find a wide variety of lesson plans related to media literacy for all grades.

Now back to the news!
Chad.



PEITF
Newsletter

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by Chad Gallant



Canadian Teachers' Federation

In Uganda, You are Most Welcome

- by Megan Morrison -



SUMMER 2016

It was the summer of my dreams. I was fortunate enough to be one of 54 Canadian teachers selected to participate in the Canadian Teachers' Federation's project through their International and Social Justice Program - Project Overseas. Project Overseas (PO) is a joint endeavor of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and its member organizations to support overseas partners in developing countries as they deliver professional services to teachers. This year, CTF worked with teachers in 11 countries in Africa and the Caribbean.

Preparation for Project Overseas: In the months leading up to our departure in July, we communicated daily with our P.O. team via email and had several Skype calls. Our partner organization in Uganda, the Ugandan National Teachers' Union (UNATU), wanted this summer's project to focus on Numeracy, English, Literacy, Physical Education and Life Skills for primary teachers (Grades 1-3). We would be working with 160 teachers and principals (called head teachers) over two weeks.

Our team members brought different strengths to the team. I was assigned to teach Physical Education and Life Skills (skills and values such as teamwork and self-esteem, embedded within each outcome in their curriculum), along with planning "Canada Night" and co-facilitating workshops on gender equity, AIDS / HIV and malaria and waterborne disease prevention. I met with and spoke to several people who'd participated in the past or had visited Eastern Africa and did a great deal of research online in an attempt to be as prepared as possible. Our final preparations took place in Ottawa together with all PO participants. Past PO participants and CTF staff facilitated these sessions. We arrived in Ottawa on July 2nd (about 36 hours after I walked out the door of Montague Intermediate) and departed for Uganda on July 4th.

Arrival in Uganda: CTF had two teams traveling to Uganda; one to Mbale, in Eastern Uganda, and our team to Masaka, in Western Uganda. We were traveling together and would spend the first few days in the capital, Kampala. During our time in Kampala, we spent long days planning our sessions, along with our Ugandan co-tutors, with whom we'd be team teaching in our respective cities. I was partnered with Erias, a wise and dedicated educator, who was willing to try anything new I suggested. UNATU wanted each of the sessions to be the same and we all benefited from time to plan together, with both our Canadian and Uganda colleagues.

As part of our time in Kampala, UNATU treated us to an unbelievable cultural experience; a cultural dance performance group in Uganda called Ndere. For three hours, we watched and listened in awe, all the while feeling so grateful that I had this amazing opportunity.

On our last day in Kampala, we packed up, checked out, and said our goodbyes to the other team. Kennedy, who was hired by UNATU to be our driver while in Masaka, met us at the hotel and we were off! The drive took most of the day, with stops at the Equator and a market. We didn't know it yet, but Kennedy would become key to our project's success. He helped us with everything from souvenir shopping, banking, setting up for our cultural nights, translating and educating us on local culture and tradition. He was one of our best friends in Uganda.

My Typical Day in Uganda: We quickly adapted to our new normal in Masaka. Over the three weeks, we had only one free day and one travel day. Otherwise, we were busy at Nedegya Core Primary Teachers' College. Our teacher participants followed a schedule that allowed for two-hour classes, with each of us having a prep period at some point during the day. Morning tea always took much longer than our half hour scheduled break, so we were always running behind. 'African time' is a real thing! We even started a half hour earlier after the first few days, to try to adhere to the times we established, but that didn't work either. Erias often pointed out to me how quickly I walked and how time conscious we were. "I like you foreign people. You are so time conscious," he would say.



Education and Life in Uganda

About half of all students attend public school while the other half attend private school. We worked only with teachers in the public school system. While many of the challenges we have are the same, Ugandan teachers definitely face very unique challenges. Not being paid on time, sexual assault towards female students and teachers, large class size (could be up to 100 students/class), corporal punishment used on students, shared bathroom facilities for boys and girls, very minimal resources, teachers showing up late or not at all and pressure to do well in national exams were frequently identified as challenges they faced.

Brainstorming, group work and think-pair-share were very foreign concepts to our teacher participants. We explained and modeled these strategies often. Sometimes they'd ask about schools in Canada. I would try to explain that I teach PE to several classes in the gymnasium. In their case, it's the classroom teacher who teaches PE, if at all, and it is outdoors. Erias guessed about 95% of all students were not getting PE, which is why it was included in their in-service. I told them it's too cold in winter to go outdoors so we have gymnasiums in our schools. They weren't really sure what a gymnasium was nor did they grasp the concept of cold or snow. They laughed when I told them a teacher in Canada would lose their job and likely go to jail for using corporal punishment.

Our school visits were definitely a highlight. The students were so excited to see us and the teachers were very welcoming. The students jumped to their feet immediately, greeted us in unison and would perform a song. They proudly displayed their workbooks. Some students wanted to touch our skin, most wanted their photo taken. They couldn't believe their eyes and were so excited when they saw their image on our screen (especially selfies!)

Uganda has suffered a great deal in recent history. Despite all they've endured, Ugandans are kind, hard-working, warm and resilient people, very deeply rooted in their faith (Christian or Muslim). I was blown away by their pride in their religion and culture. Music and dance are prominent and we tried our best to take part in their dances! I'm often asked about the poverty and, by our Canadian standards, one would say that Uganda is a poor nation. Indoor toilets are very rare, most roads are not paved and children and adults must fetch water on a daily basis. All laundry was done by hand and most people owned a few animals to supply for their family. Uganda is growing in leaps and bounds as a prime tourism destination in Eastern Africa. They've worked diligently to rebuild and protect animal populations in their national parks. Education programs on the importance of protecting the environment, along with how tourism can have a positive impact on their economy, seem to be very successful.

Safari Sisters: Almost as soon as we connected as a team, the group decided we would stay longer in Uganda and do a safari together. While not part of the actual project, having time together afterwards was really the icing on the cake. In hindsight, I cannot imagine simply finishing the project and leaving. I would have really struggled to leave Uganda so abruptly. I wasn't ready to leave. As teammates, we became very close friends and I was not ready to say goodbye. On the safari, we had a chance to explore the country and experience Uganda's true beauty. Ugandans have a reputation within Africa to be very friendly and hospitable. We laughed until our bellies were sore and took some much needed time to unwind and relax after our busy three weeks. When people ask me what the best part of the safari was, I usually answer by telling them, "all of it."

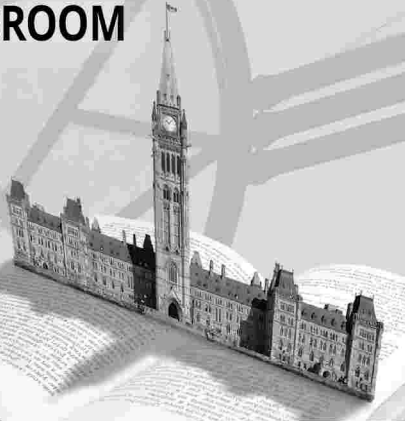
Would I go back?: I am surprised by how often I'm asked if I would go back to Uganda. I would go back tomorrow if I could. It's a beautiful, magical country with so much to offer. What they lack in infrastructure, they make up for in beauty, rich natural resources, hospitality and culture. When we arrived, we were greeted with their greeting, "you are welcome." I recall being a little confused, and thinking 'but I didn't say thank you'. Perhaps even more confusing was "You are all most welcome" which sounds like "you are almost welcome"! That statement couldn't be more true: in Uganda, you are all **most** welcome. I sometimes shake my head in disbelief at how normal the whole experience felt. When I look at pictures or videos, I literally have to remind myself that I lived it and that was my life only a few weeks ago. I can only hope I'm lucky enough to go back someday. Thank you, PEITF and CTF!

*"I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke up and I was not happy."
- Ernest Hemingway*



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continued from p. 8

are. I highly doubt that five schools will be closed. There may only be one; there may be none. Regardless, teachers and students will be impacted by the decisions, and the Federation will continue to fight for more help for teachers and more resources to try and deliver inclusive education in a way that has a positive impact for all students.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the teachers who gave their input into the process. To my knowledge, all of the presentations and feedback were done in a professional and meaningful way. It is very important to hear teachers' voices through a process such as this one, and I want to thank the Public Schools Branch for allowing teachers to speak publicly throughout the review of its schools. Teachers own voices were absent from the public debate during the school closures in the former Eastern School District, and I believe that this process has been more valuable, informative and fairer than the one used then. Hopefully, it will be this recent version that is used the next time school closures are proposed, and, unfortunately, there will be a next time. That is inevitable.

I hope you had an enjoyable and restful March Break. We are in the stretch drive. Hang in there.

Be good to yourselves and to each other.

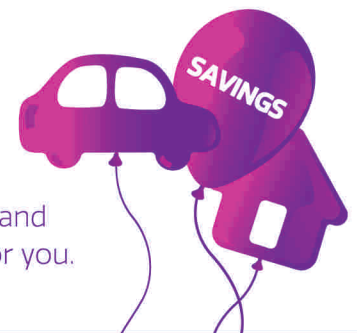
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Building Teacher Emotional Resiliency

As educators, your mission is to take care of students. Your job is to help ensure their success and see to it that they develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary to lead happy and productive lives. However, sometimes we forget to put the same energy and passion into taking care of ourselves. Emotional awareness, one of the traits of emotional resilience, is the understanding of what we are feeling and why.

What is Emotional Resilience?

Emotional resilience is the ability to recover or bounce back from and effectively adapt to life changes and challenges. It is also about a deep knowing that we can handle anything that comes our way. It's about being able to persevere and believe you are in control of your life, and are optimistic and believe in your own strength. This belief can shift how you handle problems from a victim mentality to an empowered one, and more choices open up. Anyone can strengthen their resiliency. Celebrate the resilient aspects you have in place and take action to improve the rest. Score your resilience and take action to better flourish and thrive.

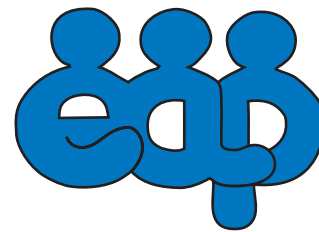
As mentioned, emotional resilience can be developed and here are some ways to strengthen your resilience:

- Develop a professional support network. Avoid the temptation to stay isolated in your classroom. Seek out colleagues who support your work emotionally and intellectually.
- Know when to get involved and when to let go.
- Maintain perspective. In challenging or stressful times, remind yourself that you make a difference. In what other profession do you have the chance to daily influence a person's entire life?
- Control your calendar. Create time for family, exercise and fun activities by actually placing those times on your calendar and follow through with that commitment to yourself.
- Deal with conflict or difficulties quickly and honestly. Rarely do problems get better by ignoring them.
- Take care of your body through diet, exercise and sleep. You need to take care of yourself so you can be healthy enough to take care of other people.
- Embrace change. In the last year your profession has had to embrace change like no others have in the past. Learn from your mistakes, see obstacles as challenges, and allow adversity to make you stronger.

- Laugh. Humor is one of the best ways to combat stress. It helps shift one's perspective from seeing things as a threat to seeing things as a challenge and this alters how the body reacts to stress. Plus a good laugh makes you feel better.
- Place a high value on professional development and actively seek it out. Be a life long learner.
- Resist the urge to complain about students, parents, co-workers, policy, and the profession in general. There is no such thing as a perfect school or a perfect organization. Work to make things better, and remember, the grass is rarely greener on the other side.
- Find a professional passion. It can be a challenge to stay current on education trends, research and best practices. Find what you love most about teaching and learning and become an expert.
- Get in touch with your spiritual side. Studies have shown that those who are more spiritual tend to be more resilient. Keeping in mind, spirituality is personal and everyone's path may be unique.

We are all highly capable and creative problem solvers who can become stronger and more resilient in stressful times. To build emotional resilience, it requires being aware of ourselves, how we react in difficult situations, and finding opportunities to practice resilience.

See *PEITE.com* for a quiz to test your emotional resilience



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Thoughts and Comments from the General Secretary



Shaun MacCormac

As I write this article, the School Review process continues with the Public Schools Branch (PSB) Board of Directors deliberating on the decisions it must make regarding the possible re-zoning, and possible closure, of one or more schools. I don't envy the Directors in this task.

The only thing that is certain is that not everyone will be happy with the outcome, regardless of what that is. The reality is that the education system in this province is under-resourced. Whether you are a small, medium, or large school, or a rural or urban school, teachers and students need help, and they need it now.

The vast majority of school students in this province attend a publicly funded school, and that is a good thing. It does, however, create a funding challenge for the Liberal Government, especially as it tries to reach a balanced budget before the next election.

The two general parameters that seem to be set by government are: stay within the current budget and "re-distribute" students. The first one is an assumption on my part; the second one was made clear by the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture. Both of these can be reasonably met, but one question is - will our education system be improved at the end of this process?

I, like you, await the decisions of the PSB. If part of those decisions is to close one or more schools, that decision will have to go to the Provincial Cabinet. If the Cabinet needs to be involved in the process, it usually sits on Tuesdays, and I don't expect much of a delay if a decision is needed by this group. Having politicians involved in this type of decision always provides for uncertainty and many people will be watching with interest if school closures are proposed.

Proposals to close schools always bring about questions and concerns. The most vocal of people are always those who want a school to remain open. That is understandable. Schools mean a lot to many people and they mean a lot to communities. Very few people, if anyone, like to see a school close.

The PEI Teachers' Federation (PEITF) does not like to see schools close. Our President, Bethany MacLeod, has stated that

publicly on a number of occasions. Teachers know what schools mean to communities. It is, however, a "motherhood statement" to say that schools should not close. If schools are to remain open, they need to be funded and resourced properly. If a government is not committed to doing so in a proper way, decisions need to be made. The current government has committed to keeping the same number of full-time equivalent teachers (FTEs) in the system for next year, which is better than a cut, but I have not heard of any increases to the education budget that would help in any significant way to meet the increasing demands of an inclusive education system.

There has been a lot of effort put into this school review process. A report has been done, public meetings have been held, and many people have given input and feedback on the recommendations. Some of that feedback has been insightful, some of it has been unhelpful, and some of it has been down right mean-spirited.

In fact, I find it ironic that our school boards operate under "Caring Places to Learn/Safe School Environment" policies, yet there have been demonstrations of lack of respect at public meetings and parents/community members who have exhibited bullying and intimidating behaviour during this process. Regardless of the emotion involved during discussions of school closures, this behaviour is unacceptable and would not be expected or tolerated in our schools. Thankfully, this behaviour was limited, but it does detract from the whole process and does not add anything meaningful in helping our education system as a whole.

You probably know the outcomes of this process as you read this article. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that not all of the recommendations in the report will be implemented. I'm not aware of any major report where all the recommendations *continued on p. 6*

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