

EDUCATION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

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Notes from the Margin

It is difficult to believe that another academic year has blazed by. Once again, students are scrambling to finish their year. Teachers, for the most part, are looking forward to a well-deserved break after another tumultuous year in education.

The Fraser Institute, a research organization with a decidedly right of centre perspective, has released the results of its latest high school ranking. This latest release ranked high schools in Ontario. I was emphatically unsurprised to discover that the top tier consisted almost entirely of private schools.

Begging the question of, what is the point of this anyway, the Institute would have us believe, such research goes straight to the heart of accountability. No matter that the criteria for ranking was so narrow that it could only favour the well-heeled schools in either the private or public sectors. The study ignored completely schools that have a specific mandate such as vocational training yet instead focused on advanced academic courses and the number of like graduates. Even the private schools were embarrassed by the results and hastened to say publicly that many other factors need to be considered when assessing a school's overall performance. The top-ranked schools were pleased nonetheless.

What is not working is the lack of money and resources that are simply starving public education in Canada. Governments at the federal and provincial levels, with few exceptions, are not providing funds for public education at needed levels.

This means that young children need a good start when they begin school. Adequate resources must be provided as a child moves through each grade level. This means reasonable class sizes, support staff, enough teachers who are properly trained and learning resources that are available and up-to-date. After which, tuition fees at the community college and university levels must be affordable for all families or at least the availability of scholarships, grants, bursaries in combination with loans should supplement those who can't foot the bill on their own. And why is this important?

Strangely, I'd like to refer to Peter Lougheed, former Premier of Alberta. When he was in power, I dismissed him as just another fat cat from that oil rich sheikdom. My mistake. Mr. Lougheed is both a statesman and a moderate. He has said that public education is not an expenditure, it is an investment and society will see a return on that investment. Sure, public education isn't cheap. But as Richard Worzel quotes in his column, public education is expensive but what is the price of ignorance?

Next Issue

- Back to School
- Bilingual Issue
- School Rankings: What's the Point?
- Curricula, Futures, Web Stuff and more

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ART FOR PEACE

Students' Art for Peace, founded by Riley Conarroe, is a global art program. Students ranging from grade three to the post-secondary level exchange their artwork with other students of the same age

across the world. Conarroe believes his program gives students "the knowledge that they are doing something personally and individually to promote global understanding and peace in the world." Although basically an art program, Art for Peace also teaches geography, civics, social studies, and history. Each class taking part in the program receives an official gold-sealed certificate identifying the students as International Art Ambassadors of Peace. A Peace Picture contest is held annually. Schools, teachers, and students winning blue or red ribbons receive both local and global recognition. Privately funded, there is no charge for participating in this program. For more information, visit www.art-for-peace.org. Teachers that wish to participate in the program and receive a teacher's kit should email their name, school name and address, and grade level of students to participate to artpeaceman@aol.com.

GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY IN B.C. SCHOOLS

A study conducted by researchers from the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Simon Fraser University has found that in the past 10 years, there has been no increase in the numbers of female students enrolled in technology-intensive courses in B.C.'s secondary schools. The researchers are warning that major curriculum reforms are required. In computer science and information technology courses, the participation of female students remains significantly below 50 percent of the total students enrolled; their number declines as students move towards grade 12, where the average is 20 percent. Find more information on the study at www.shecan.com, or contact Mary Bryson, associate professor at the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education, Tel: 604-875-5284, Email: mary.bryson@ubc.ca.

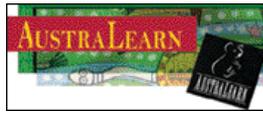


OUR KIDS CAN VOTE - CANADA

Nearly 5000 students under the age of 18 showed up at advance municipal polling stations last fall in Burlington, Markham, Newmarket, Pickering, and Toronto. Students were asked to vote

on issues ranging from the importance of voting to recycling to safety in their schools. This opportunity was provided by the Our Kids Can Vote - Canada program, developed by The Learning Partnership. This program is designed to teach students in grades 4-10 about the electoral process. Our Kids Can Vote - Canada aims to educate students, through the public school system, about the importance of an informed electorate and of the act of voting to sustain democracy. It also hopes to help create lifetime voters of today's youth, to remind parents of their civic responsibility, and to increase the adult voter turnout in elections. In order to vote, the students had to be accompanied by a parent or family member. For more information about Our Kids Can Vote, visit www.tlp.on.ca, or contact The

Learning Partnership, Tel: 416-204-4478, Fax: 416-204-4378, Email: info@tlp.on.ca.



TEACHER TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

AustraLearn: North American Center

for Australian Universities has developed the "Overseas Student Teaching Practicum." This new program allows college students who are pursuing their teaching certification in the US or Canada to fulfill part of their training requirements in Australia or New Zealand. The 8-10 week practicum offers students the opportunity to learn about the education system while teaching under the supervision of primary and secondary school teachers and university education faculty. The practicums are located at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, University of Newcastle in Newcastle, Australia, and the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. The cost of the program ranges from US \$1200 to US \$2630 for an 8-10 week term. Cost includes placement, orientation, briefing sessions, on-going student supervision, final evaluation, transfer of credits to home university, and assistance with passports and airline tickets. Several sessions are available during the 12-month school term. For application information, students should contact AustraLearn at Colorado State University, Denver Center, 110 16th Street, 2nd Floor, Denver, CO, 80202, Tel: 1-800-980-0033 / 303-446-2214, Fax: 303-446-5955, Email: studyabroad@australearn.org. For further information, or to order an enrollment guide, visit www.australearn.org.



TELETOON CREATIVE SPARKS SCHOOL PROGRAM

In May, 2001, grades 4-6 teachers in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal will receive applications for the

TELETOON Creative Sparks School Program. Teachers will be encouraged to register for the program this spring in order to receive the education package in June 2001. The program consists of no-charge curriculum materials, a chart outlining relevance to provincially-mandated curriculum, a contest outline, and an animation "how-to" video. The Creative Sparks program will commence in September 2001 and continue through the Spring of 2002. Creative Sparks gives classrooms the opportunity to write stories, learn about the arts and how the arts relate to other education disciplines, and use animation graphics and information. In order to maintain student interest in arts information, TELETOON will periodically send educational incentives to students when the teacher returns their completed worksheets. For further information, contact Carol Green, President, Children's Creative Marketing Inc., Tel: 905-763-0697, Email: carol@childrenscreativemkt.com.

Web Stuff

by marjan glavac

Community Learning Network

<http://www.cln.org/>

The main menu of the Community Learning Network is a well organized source of educational resources for the K-12 teacher. The following links: Educational WWW Resources for K-12 Students and Teachers, Integrate the Internet into the Classroom, Learn More about the Internet, Professional Development in Information Technology and Province of British Columbia's K-12 Educational Community are followed by detailed descriptions and key words. True to its description CLN provides direct links to exemplary educational WWW resources from our intuitive menus. By finding, previewing, describing, and linking to exemplary sites, CLN's staff save teachers an enormous amount of time that they would have wasted otherwise in fruitless browsing.

The CLN staff also review and update links to resources to eliminate the frustrations of searching for busy educators. Two valuable resources are the daily Network Nuggets and the CLN Update listservs which keep members informed to the latest Internet resources and updates on all the sites that have been added to the CLN site in the past week.

A very useful and fruitful resource for teachers are the CLN theme pages. Here can be found links which focus on a theme found in the K-12 curriculum. The curricular links provide informational resources for those interested in learning more about the topic while the instructional materials links provide support (e.g., lesson plans, instructional tips) for teachers.

The CLN staff have certainly made their site easy to use for the busy educator.

Eduscapes

<http://eduscapes.com/>

A great starting point for any teacher beginning their unit and lesson planning is the 42explore link on this Web site. This is a marvelous collection of topics for K-12 students. Each week new topics are posted and previous topics are listed alphabetically and according to the date it was posted.

What I particularly like about the 42explore link is the authors' understanding of the nature of the Internet, the needs of teachers and students. The four in the title rhymes with explore. The four also stands for four Web sites on a particular topic, because sometimes Web sites go down, content changes or it's just too slow. With four sites for teachers and students to access, chances are the information and resources will be available. There's nothing more frustrating for teachers and students when the key Web site for your topic and project isn't available anymore. With four to explore, the learning experiences for teachers and students will be a positive one.

This site also offers the Lamb's Technology Integration section. This invaluable section provides resources for parents, teachers, library/media specialists, administrators, and technology coordinators. Found here are materials for workshops or for teacher's professional development.

Highly recommended are the following two links: Lamb's Cool Starting Points for Teachers, Parents and Children and Seven Simple Starters: Realistic Internet Integration. The following seven questions are asked and answered: What can I do daily or weekly? How can I connect to each subject area? What project would help me reach outside my classroom? How can I promote learning through technology? How can technology help students solve problems? How can my students share their projects with others? How can we use technology to create smiles?

Head over to this site to find the answers to the above questions!

Room 108

<<http://www.netrover.com/%7Ekingskid/108.html>>
[netrover.com/~kingskid/108.html](http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/108.html) <<http://www.netrover.com/%7Ekingskid/108.html>>

Room 108 is a Web site from primary teacher John Rickey with the Trillium Lakelands Board of Education in Ontario, Canada. It is a primary learning site that makes learning fun through educational games. There are animated picture books, games, Spelling, Math, Music and Art activities on this site.

The stories section contains unique and complete interactive picture books. Student interest is maintained using animated pictures, changing background music and sound effects. Students can sometimes click buttons to hear sounds that relate to the story. Most stories finish with a self-marking comprehension test, that scores the student on errors. There are also interactive jigsaw and crossword puzzles and colouring activities based on the stories.

Enter the music section and music automatically comes on when entering a song page. Animations reflect the words of the song. Teachers can get the music for some songs which will have the guitar, lyrics and piano scored. Students can compose or change music and have it played back. Anyone playing the flute or piano will love this section—music is displayed on the screen and you can print out a copy of the music and play along. Visitors that don't own an instrument can have their computer keyboard turned into a drum set or an organ so they can play along with music. There are almost 200 different compositions in different styles of music in the Jukebox section.

The Minute Math in the Math activities allows the teacher or student to customize a group of questions. This activity then marks the student's work.

Room 108 is a fun place to learn for all elementary students. Keep posted to this site for exciting upcoming additions and activities.

Mr. Marjan Glavac is the author "The Busy Educator's Guide To The World Wide Web" and a teacher based in London, Ontario. He can be reached at marjan@glavac.com or <http://www.glavac.com>.



Hero to Zero: *What Next?*

by Richard Worzel



The status of teachers has fallen dramatically over the last 100 years, especially so in the last 10. This begs the questions: Why has this happened? And what happens next?

Teaching used to be considered a profession comparable to medicine or law. Hiring a teacher in a community was an important event because people were entrusting their children to an educated individual to teach them things that the adults either didn't know or weren't very sure of. So part of the status of teachers came from their greater learning, much as we look at researchers working in quantum physics or human genetics with a kind of awe because we know we're not capable of doing such work.

As education levels have risen, this awe and respect for the intellectual accomplishments of teachers has gradually fallen. Today's parents are not in awe of teachers intellectually, and probably subconsciously put teachers on the same intellectual plane as the children they are teaching, even though this is obvious nonsense for anyone who actually thinks about it.

Meanwhile, the way we treat elected officials and celebrities has changed. When FDR and John F. Kennedy were presidents of the United States, the press corps knew all about their triflin' ways, their peccadilloes, and their dark sides, but said nothing. They talked the president up, not down, and made the man in the post an object of rev-

erence. When Mickey Mantle or Bing Crosby were popular, the press held them up to idol worship, and never mind that you might not have wanted to invite them home to meet the family. The image was the reality, as far as the public was told, and these were gods, not humans. Nixon's Watergate adventure changed the relationship between press and celebrity, opening the way for media questioning of the human failings behind the plaster-image god. What started as a tentative trickle has become a rushing torrent, so that it now seems as if the primary goal in creating a celebrity is to tear him or her down.

This attitude has gradually rubbed off on the general public, so that anyone in an elevated position, whether it's a position of responsibility or celebrity, is automatically open to criticism. Clearly this applies to local heroes as much as distant ones, and that includes teachers.

Next, consider the transformation of the workplace over the last 10 years. The traditional, unwritten contract in which the employer and employee tacitly agree to be loyal to each other has evaporated. The accelerating and continual change in marketplace needs has led to a world where job security no longer

exists, and salaries can go up, down, or disappear altogether. The result is a working world where people feel they have to work longer hours merely to hold onto what they have, and anxiety, insecurity, and frustration are daily companions. When parents compare this with the stereotypical work life that teachers supposedly enjoy - you know, knocking off work at 3 o'clock, taking summers off, two weeks for Christmas, and so on - and look at the relative job security and fat pension teachers get upon early retirement, they wonder what teachers are doing that's so hard to warrant such cushy treatment. And besides, while nobody but a quantum physicist knows what a quantum physicist does, everyone's been to school, and therefore feels they're an expert on education.

Finally, consider the children being educated. They are the spoiled children of spoiled children, the "whatever" generation. If they get into trouble at school, they don't have to worry that they'll get into even more trouble at home, as used to be the case. Instead, they may be able to get their parent to come storming in to demand how the teacher screwed up, and how dare they discipline this angelic, perfect child. Even when it doesn't entirely work, it puts the teacher on the defensive, and may make them think twice before criticizing the student.

The sum total of all these changes is that your status as a teacher has



gone from hero to zero. So what's going to happen from here on? That will depend, in part, on what teachers and teachers' unions do from here.

The overwhelming fact that dominates the future of education is the massive shortage of teachers that is already being felt, and will get disastrously worse, as time goes on. Within five years, we will have a full-blown crisis on our hands.

In a market economy, scarcity pushes up the price, and makes something more valuable, so a simplistic analysis would indicate that teachers' salaries and working conditions are going to improve as teacher shortages takes hold. Counterbalancing this, the education system is the second most expensive social program in our economy, after health care. With the aging of the baby boomers, the cost of health care is going to go through the roof. Since older voters tend to vote selfishly (like everyone else), elected officials are going to be looking for ways of cutting expenses outside of health care, which puts education squarely in their sights as a place to try to take money out of, not put back into.

So we have this kind of "irresistible force meets an immovable object" problem: we will need to spend more money on education, but, as a society, we will be trying to spend less. And I believe that the way teachers and their unions behave may have a profound effect on the resulting debate. If the demand for teachers pushes bargaining units into a sort of "we've got them where we want them, now we're going to get even" swagger, then community relations will continue to worsen, every dollar devoted to education will be given grudgingly, and teachers will be seen as gouging profiteers, exploiting a society helpless to resist, in addition to being lazy layabouts. "We may need teachers," the feeling may run, "but we sure don't like it." This will result in a downward spiral, as it will further repel young teachers from the field, compounding the problems, and leading to disaster for everyone.

The alternative, I believe, is for teachers and their representatives to take the high road, and hope (and I use that word deliberately) that society listens. Don't talk about the abuses you have undoubtedly suffered. Talk about the need to attract a new generation of teachers. Talk about the need for professionalism, and take the lead in pushing for professional standards, even when some of the provincial initiatives are publicity-driven claptrap. Talk about the higher education needs of today's children to compete in a global economy, and the higher standards that this requires. Talk about the higher productivity that results from better education,

and the greater prosperity that results, more than paying for the cost of education. Enlist private industry to talk about their needs for creativity, for innovation, and for self-starting workers that can do more than just repeat textbook learning and go beyond narrow skills training - then point out that we don't have the resources to do this today.

Finally, quote Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." And keep your cool, because the times ahead are going to be tumultuous, and someone ought to be thinking instead of just emoting. If you can do these things, you may not be seen as a hero, but you may well be a saviour.

Richard Worzel is a Toronto-based futurist who volunteers his time to speak to high school students, as his schedule permits. Contact him care of TEACH magazine, or by e-mail at futurist@futuresearch.com

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WORLDWIDE BIOME PROJECT

The Worldwide Biome Project

Biome Project

By John Cordukes

Are you looking for a way to excite your students? Would you like to have them stretch the borders of their imagination? Do you want to expose them to an increased level of computer technology? If you've answered yes to any of these questions, then maybe you are ready to participate in an Internet project, or perhaps even develop your own.

The Internet allows you and your classes access to some amazing educational opportunities. The super thing about existing projects is that they are all set to go—all you need to do is find one that will fulfill your curricular expectations. There are many different educational Web sites that post projects dealing with every grade level and subject area. Your class can have fun identifying and learning about African animals through poetry at the Safari project (Global Schoolhouse). Budding authors can write about issues pertaining to teens and submit their articles to Zine It, which then publishes them in an Internet magazine (The Connected Classroom). Your science class can record local acid precipitation and submit their data to Acid Watch to see how geography has altered the findings from other schools (The Connected Classroom). WhaleWatch allows you to download data from oceanographers for use in prepared lesson plans that teach math, biology and earth science (Environet). Learn about the Mayan civilization from MayaQuest (Epals). Scan these project registries for even more projects, or you use Internet search engines to look for other educational project registry sites on the Web at large.

Once you've found a project, follow the information at the site to determine if it fits your curricular expectations, grade level, computer facilities, and time frame. If it fits well, then sign up! Projects range from requiring minimal computer time, perhaps making only a single submission to

a site, to making a few submissions, to following the progress of a project at various points through time. Project topics span the entire curriculum, from arts to wildlife, from kindergarten to high school.

If you have an idea that you think others might like to try, then maybe you should try hosting your own project. A few years ago, I felt that I wanted to design my own project to increase students' appreciation and understanding of ecology, both in their biome and in biomes from other parts of the world. I thought that an Internet project would be an interesting way to accomplish this. I envisioned students learning about their local ecology by doing field studies. I saw them using the Internet to send their data and images to me so I could translate their findings into Web pages. They, and anyone else, could then learn about the ecology of biomes by viewing this real life, student-gathered data. If classes wanted, they could even share e-mail exchanges about ecological concerns in their areas with other classes from other places. That summer I planned and created my Web site, and The World Wide Biome Project was "born".

When starting off a collaborative Internet project, as with any assignment, you need to plan carefully. Decide on your specific goals. Do you want an e-mail exchange of ideas? Are you hoping to collect information or student work to post to the Web? Will students require a lot of computer access? You also need to decide on what grade levels you wish to have join your project and the time span over which your project will run. Some of the project registries, like The Connected Classroom, have Web pages offering useful suggestions and superb people that can provide great help, both at project design and promotion.

Next, you need to create the Web pages that will make up your project. These form the introduction and body to the project and can be where you will display the final product. There are many excellent books on how to create Web pages—the process can be almost as simple as word processing





with images. Fellow teachers are superb sources of hints and advice. Your own students might even design the Web pages as part of their technology class. Keeping themes running through the linked pages, like a common background or colour scheme, helps make the site attractive. Colourful images greatly increase the

interest of the site, but be careful; too many will increase the downloading time of your pages.

You will need a server site to post your Internet pages. This is the computer space that holds your files and lets people on the Web see them. Your board of education probably has a Web site that they can let you join. Local Internet service providers may donate server space to you for educational use. The Internet also has sites (Geocities) that will host your site.

Once you have your project ready and visible on the Internet, you will want to advertise it to prospective teachers and their classes. There are many great education Project Registry sites on the Internet. Most ask you to fill out an "invitation to join" describing your project. Teachers interested in joining projects browse these sites and then contact the teachers running the projects they wish to join. The Global Schoolhouse, The Connected Classroom and Environet are just a few of the excellent registry sites available. Most government ministries of education also run similar sites. You can visit the Web sites of schools (Web 66) and invite specific subject teachers to join. You can also register your project, or its key words, with Web search engines such as Yahoo and Alta Vista. Another suggestion is to let local teachers know of your project through idea-sharing channels within boards of education. The more you advertise, the greater the response you will receive.

Now the fun begins. Hearing from interesting people from all over the planet is pretty neat. Sometimes you will hear from many teachers in a short time span who are interested in joining your project. That is when you need good time management to be able to respond to their enquiries without much delay. They need to know the parameters of the project and whether it will fit in with their schedule and student ability level. The more that you can help them out and accommodate their classes, the more people you will have join your project. This is a very rewarding part of doing a project - you hear from keen teachers with good ideas, and it can be quite motivating.

When classes start sending you material, you need to be able to respond to them in whatever manner your project entails. They may have a short window of time to work on your project, and you want to let them see the results as quickly as possible. If your class is participating at the same time, you need to have them coordinate with their Internet partners.

Creating an Internet project opens up a lot of learning opportunities that you might not expect. You will get ideas you may never have thought of from the teachers with

whom you correspond. I had one teacher from New Zealand share concerns and information regarding introduced species in her country. Her class communicated with my senior students through e-mail, an opportunity that I would never have had without doing The World Wide Biome Project. I had another teacher from the Netherlands involve my class in a worldwide survey of wildflower distribution, all through a contact regarding my Internet project. A teacher from Arizona shared some amazing ways of using the Internet in her class as a method of gathering student work on a daily basis. And then there are the fascinating ecological projects that students submitted to the site. The moments in time when there was little activity on my Web site, despite hours and hours of work, were all overshadowed by these many rewarding experiences.

I would be remiss if I did not mention some of the pitfalls that can hinder Internet projects. Computer glitches can use up valuable class time. You may spend hours finding a project that meets your needs. Designing and running a project takes a lot of free time. Many more people will show interest in your project than will join, which can be disappointing. However, similar things can be said about any innovative activity that you may try.

The Internet offers an unparalleled opportunity to join, or design, a tremendous variety of activities for your students. Its ability to quickly allow students from disparate areas to communicate and share ideas is truly satisfying. While these activities can demand a lot of your time, they can be infinitely rewarding. Try browsing through some of the project registries. Who knows, maybe I'll meet you and your class on the Web.

John Cordukes is acting Facilitator of Science at Cobourg DCI West in Cobourg, Ontario. He may be contacted at jcord@eagle.ca

Useful Web Sites

1. The Connected Classroom <http://www.qesn.meq.gouv.qc.ca/cc/index.htm>
2. Environet Simmons College <http://earth.simmons.edu/>
3. ePals <http://www.epals.com>
4. The Global Schoolhouse <http://www.gsh.org>
5. GrassRoots <http://www.merlin.mb.ca/grassroots/>
6. The World Wide Biome Project <http://www2.kpr.edu.on.ca/cdciw/biomes/>
7. Web 66 <http://web66.coled.umn.edu/>

GIFTED CLASS PUSHES TEACHERS TO THE MAX

Teachers to the Max

by David Cooper

Wanted: Local Public School requires a teacher to teach a class of gifted students. Send applications to...

Ads like this show up every year on the job market. Why? Since I am not a permanent teacher I only see the jobs that get posted externally. This means that the schools have not been able to fill these positions internally within the school board and now must throw it open to qualified outsiders. Existing teachers don't seem to apply.

When you look at the job, it sounds ideal for a teacher. It conjures up many nice mental images. You probably have a smaller class because it is classified as a special education class. You shouldn't have as many behaviour problems as you would have in a regular class. The students will all be excellent academically - after all this is a prerequisite to getting into the class. You can provide challenging material to them. The parents will probably want to be involved and will be concerned about the progress of their child. You can be more flexible with the curriculum. The students will provide some interesting and innovative answers. When you think about it, it really sounds great.

So why are they always advertising for these positions? Is it that there are more gifted classes appearing every year? According to a resource teacher in the Peel Board of Education in Ontario, teachers of gifted classes usually quit after two years. Quite often, many of the teachers of gifted classes are new teachers.

Two years. Considering you have to work more than two years to reach retirement, what is happening in these classes? Why are teachers not staying? Let's start by examining the reasons people take these classes in the first place. Usually it is for the reasons mentioned above. If you are a new teacher, it can be an excellent way to land a permanent position with your local school board. The perception of a smaller class, a special education program and its associated support staff, more parental involvement, and more interesting answers from the students sounds appealing.

But something must be happening if teachers are not staying in these positions. What solutions will keep teachers in these gifted programs? Do these perceptions reflect the reality of teaching a class like this?

What are the criteria to be admitted into these programs? A number of factors that can be considered. Performance in school can be a good indicator. However, this may also not be a good indicator as students who are not being challenged may not perform well. CCAT, IQ, and other scores may be considered. Students must score in the highest range in a particular category to be considered for admission. Even though



Heather Kozak leads her class of enhanced grade 1, 2, and 3's in a language lesson.

they may perform exceptionally well in one category however, they may be below average in another. This can lead to a very wide range in ability within the classroom.

What about the teachers in these programs? Do they receive any special training in order to work with the students? In Ontario, the minimum requirements for a teacher beyond the regular qualifications are two extra courses. They are typically known as 'Special Ed, Part One.' It is a two-part course. The first section of the course deals with Special Education in general. The process of identifying students is covered along with many of the common problems found in

JELC: Junior Enhanced Learning Class. This is a contained class for enhanced students in Grades 4, 5, and 6.

PELC: Primary Enhanced Learning Class. This is a contained class for enhanced students in grades 1, 2, and 3.

IELC: Intermediate Enhanced Learning Class. This is for students in grades 7 and 8.

Mode 2: A student is in a regular class, but you are pulled out for periods of enhancement.

Mode 3: The students are in a contained class for enhancement, such as a PELC or JELC.

IEP: Individual Education Plan

CCAT: Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test. This test is given to all students in grade Four.

ISSP: In School Support Program. Students in this category are usually pulled out of their class for extra help a few periods a week.

ISELP: In School Enhanced Learning Program. Enhanced students in this category are pulled out once a week.



Students in Rhonda Cooper's class are training fish to jump over a bar using only a mirror as a reward.

special education. The focus of this course covers all special education topics. The second segment of the course is an elective, called "Gifted and Talented." This is the section of the course that focuses on the gifted students. There are additional courses that can be taken, but this is the minimum.

One grade three teacher I spoke with gave me a short answer as to why they no longer teach an enhanced class. "Simple. Parents and IEPs." As I began to discuss this with other teachers I noticed many common answers coming from all of them.

Parents

Parents were a huge factor for many of the teachers with whom I spoke. This year a PELC class opened up at Briarwood Public School in Mississauga, Ontario and Heather Kozak, a teacher of 15 years applied for and landed the position. When it comes to parents, Kozak says "The pressure is remarkable compared to any other class I've ever taught. Often parents have done outside testing and are watching closely to see if their kids are intellectually stimulated."

Also at Briarwood is Rhonda Cooper, teacher of the JELC class. She fondly remembers one Wednesday this past February. "That was the one day when I didn't hear from any parents." Other than that Cooper hears from at least one parent a day, including weekends. Parents show up before or after school, phone the school, or email her. "Parental communication takes up a large part of my time," she adds.

What do these parents have to say? Usual comments, according to Heather Kozak, are, "Parents say kids have been bored, haven't been stimulated, or haven't been working to their potential." Most of the teachers I spoke with shared similar experiences with concerning parents. Many teachers in regular classes often complain that they never hear from the parents. Teachers in the gifted classes tend to hear from all the parents, all the time. Heather Kozak is the only teacher at her school that has a telephone in her classroom. Even with the addition of the telephone, she still has difficulty finding the time to keep up with all of the parental communication.

Not only are the parents demanding of the teachers, but

also of their children. Rhonda Cooper often has students in her class crying because of the pressure placed on them by their parents to achieve.

What if there is more than one gifted child in the family? Martin Sarkar, a teacher of an ELC class at Greenbriar Senior Public School in Mississauga, Ontario does not have a contained class of enhanced students. Half the day he has a 'regular' class, the other half day is spent with enhanced students. Says Sarkar: "There's still this hierarchical, pecking order amongst some parents who have kids in the gifted program. I hear what some of my own friends say during social gatherings about their 'gifted' kids and it turns my stomach."

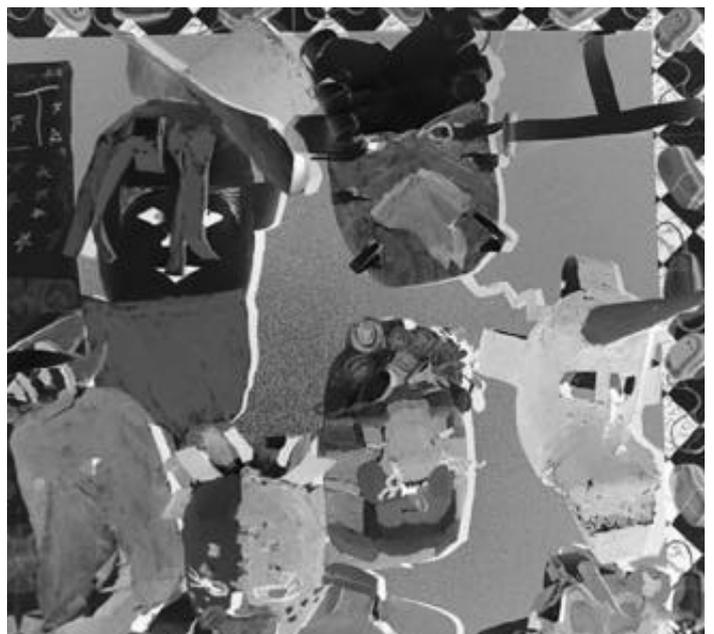
In Rhonda Cooper's class the competition between two gifted siblings grew so intense that one of them now attends a private school while the other attends the public school.

Martin Sarkar adds that there is significant "parental pressure for their kids to achieve level 4's (which incidentally does not earmark a gifted kid.....the perception or stereotype is that these kids are good at everything, when they are not)."

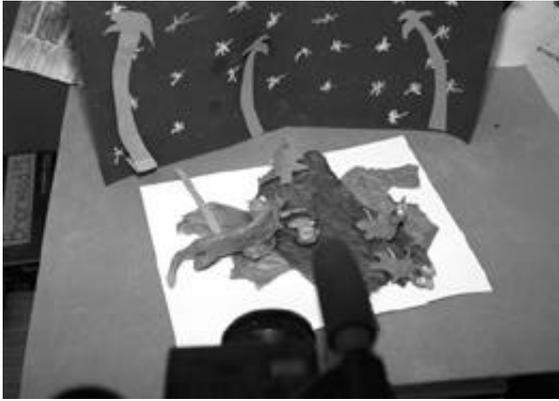
Olha Pelech teaches a 7/8 enhanced class at Green Glades Senior Public School in Mississauga, Ontario. She has been teaching this class since 1986. She says, "If you are up front with your parents and have an open door concept with them and they know what you are doing it is not an issue."

IEPs

Another negative factor affecting this job is the IEP. In a regular class you prepare only the report cards. Any teacher in Ontario will tell you the current report is already quite lengthy and time consuming. In a special education situation you have the additional work of the IEP. An IEP is defined as an Individual Education Plan. This is a plan of action which is agreed upon by the parents and teachers that addresses the individual needs of the student and how those needs will be met, what the goal is, and how you will assess that goal. Each term you report on any progress that has been made. It is a



Each student's work is as individual as their mask.



Students in Rhonda Cooper's class prepare stop-motion claymation projects for their art activities.

plan consisting of year-long goals. Essentially, most teachers view the work involved as a second report card. Rhonda Cooper says, "You are not compensated with more money or extra time to complete these additional responsibilities. I have twice the amount of reports to do in the same amount of time."

Olha Pelech admits that the IEP program really isn't an individual program. "Realistically it is not. You can't do that with 25 kids. If you think I'm running an individual program, I'm not. I'm running a differentiated program. We are all going from A to B."

In New South Wales in Australia the IEP exists for students in special education, but they do not use them with the gifted kids.

Special Education

One teacher I spoke to told me that "teaching gifted education is like teaching a special ed class without the support that is given to special ed." Usually special education classes are small. I've visited behaviour classes that have 12 students. I've visited GLD classes that have about 10 students. I even visited one contained behaviour class that had 4 students. The adults in this class were a teacher, a teaching assistant, and two social workers. Four adults working with four children. Since enhanced classes are special education classes with a lot of focus on the students' performance you would expect these classes to be smaller.

Rhonda Cooper states, "It is regular capacity. It can go up to 25 students. Currently I have 23." This shows that this special class has about the same number of students as other classes in the school. In many special education situations teaching assistants are provided. Many regular classes have a teaching assistant who is paid to be in the class full-time to help out one student with special needs. Every behaviour class that I have visited also had a teaching assistant who was there at least half of the time. None of the enhanced learning classes I visited had a teaching assistant. Do they need one? Shouldn't these children be hard at work and know better? Do they have any behaviour problems? Says Cooper: "Yes. I have two students - not officially designated. The younger the gifted child is the more they tend to be eccentric. As they age they conform more. Often times even though the child is

gifted doesn't mean they aren't without other designations such as learning disabilities." In fact, Cooper has one student in her class who will not write. She must sit with this student one-on-one and assess him orally or write his answers down for him.

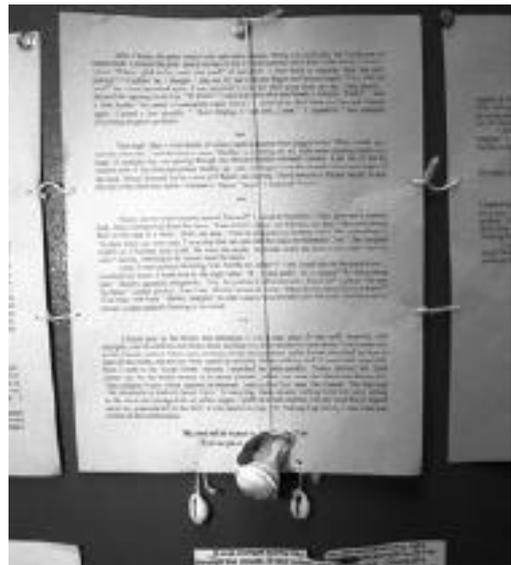
As far as resource people go Heather Kozak says, "There is a general resource person, but they are spread very thin. Being in a school for 14 years, this has been the farthest away I've felt from the rest of the staff." She pauses for a moment before adding, "I feel isolated."

The lack of special education support for this special education program leads to an increase in the level of stress and dissatisfaction associated with this position.

The labelling of a class as "PELC" or "JELC" can increase the isolation of the students. Students in the school know that a particular class is not just a 'grade four.' This can cause some trouble for students fitting in with the rest of the school. At Green Glades Senior Public they have a numbered class like any other. Ohla Pelech explains, "We are called 8-1. No one knows it is enhanced. They want to be treated like the other classes... gifted kids don't want to be different. It is not something they chose." Likewise, the LD class at Green Glades is just given a regular class number for the same reasons.

Split Grade

Most teachers would agree that planning for the one grade level is difficult enough. The majority of enhanced programs tend to be split grades. In Rhonda Cooper's case she has to teach the grade four and five curriculum. In Heather Kozak's situation she is required to teach grades one, two and three. Fortunately, this year there were no grade ones. However, in January a grade one student was added to her class. She now has three grade levels to for which to prepare. Often, the topics are quite different so you have to plan your day differently. You need to be able to have one grade working independently while you explain the work to the others.



StoryBoard: The 'short stories' Rhonda Cooper receives from her grade four students have sometimes exceeded seventy pages.

CURRICULA

THIS IS A 6 PAGE REPRODUCIBLE INSERT TO BE USED AS A TEACHING TOOL

The Power of the Media Project

The media; all knowing, all seeing, omnipotent. How misleading then is the dictionary definition of medium: a substance or agent through which anything acts; a means: Radio is a medium of communication (Gage Canadian Dictionary, 1997). Just as television is an individual medium, so is film, the Internet, and print among others. So is live theatre and spectacle considered the same. The media has become pervasive now that we have adopted pagers, cell phones and other wireless technologies. Messages reach us everywhere round the clock, seven days a week with no time off for good behaviour.

Humankind has long realized the power of the media. Think back to the spectacles staged in the Coliseum and the Acropolis, classical Greek theatre, the proclamations read aloud in the town square, the Rosetta Stone, the papyrus scrolls, the Gutenberg press and the many cultural and religious festivals that have been celebrated down through the millennia. All of these staged for the purpose of communicating a message, some information. We think of Marc Antony's famous speech in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and the power of his words that affected the tide of emotions in the crowd before him. How far is it from that to Martin Luther King's famous "I had a dream" speech in Washington, D.C.?





Dr. Martin Luther King

The term, media is all encompassing in that it includes the physical means of communication such as a radio frequency, a telephone line, the human voice and/or parts of the body when employed in such activities as sign language, for example. Then there is the content through which a given medium delivers it to the recipient or recipients. A loudspeaker and a voice employed at a rally are the media with the spoken words forming the content.

We now have the flexibility where we can convey information one-on-one as in a phone conversation or broadcast to millions as is evident through the medium of the Internet or television. And we know that the content delivered in the media is targeted to different sorts of audiences.

In the early days of newspaper publishing, newspapers were bought on subscription only and carried content of interest to the monied and upper classes. It took awhile for the publishers to figure out they could reach a wider audience and have their publications supported by advertising while charging the equivalent of a penny per copy so that anyone could afford it. Now, of course, this practice is an accepted norm in virtually all media. It is the rarity that excludes advertising in this day and age. As those early publishers discovered, a competitive battle raged for readers and that hasn't changed. Today, the battle is for the eyes and minds of viewers, readers, listeners as well as desktops. Media is business and a pervasive one. The publishers want a share of us, our undivided attention for some measurable period.

The public may be assaulted by messages more than ever before, outdoors, on a bus, in your home but there is also more control. The remote control, switching stations, hitting the delete key, looking at the stoplight rather than the billboard or transit shelter, listening to an audio CD rather than the radio station keep advertising and advertisers at bay. That is, if you want it. Many do and others don't. The yin and yang of advertising in the media is that, in some ways it provides useful information while attempting to influence opinion and/or purchase decisions. Is advertising merely a reflection of cultural and lifestyle trends or does it create the interest in

those developments where none existed before? The answer could be either or. For all of us to make sound decisions critical assessment is required particularly when young people have their own purchasing power and are known influencers over their parents.

In 1976, Faye Dunaway, William Holden, Peter Finch and Ned Beatty starred in the film, *Network*. The film was a cutting satire of the television industry where lives and morals were sacrificed for audience share. In one marvelous scene, Ned Beatty, who plays the head of the network talks to the befuddled anchorman played by Peter Finch. The scene is set up such that the Finch character begins to believe that Beatty's character is God who then relates his version of the world to come. That view involves a scenario where countries will cease to exist and the economies of the fifteen largest companies will rule the globe. Needless to say, the befuddled anchorman becomes "God's" disciple. The scene was both witty and frightening and according to some, clairvoyant. As we have seen, media companies have merged and taken over to bloat their size in a bid to rule both the delivery mechanisms and the content experienced by consumers. Is the satirical prophecy as conceived by screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky coming true? Or is it true already?

In this teaching unit, you and your class will explore the power of the media and determine whether there is cause for concern when it comes to media concentration through the merging of powerful media forces.

This teaching unit explores the following curriculum areas: Language Arts, Media Studies, History, Geography and Social Studies. Recommended Grade levels: Six to Twelve.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Gain insight into the history of media development in Canada.
2. Understand the state of the media industry in Canada today.
3. Assess whether the media is serving the needs of Canadian consumers.
4. Determine the importance of and role of Canadian content in the media.
5. Address real-world events and situations.
6. Think critically and work in teams.



Hollywood Actor, William Holden

Research Activities

Students will complete at least two of the following:

① Where does the media come from? How did it begin and how did it begin in Canada? Have students examine the early history of communications. For example, the historical precursor to the newsletter appeared in Rome around 479 B.C. The content of this "newsletter" listed official transactions in the Temple of Ceres but also carried news of sporting events, gladiatorial combats, political news and gossip. The "newsletters" were inscribed by educated slaves. In 60 B.C., Julius Caesar decreed that a daily reading of the news be posted in the Forum. Some early publications include: The Peking Gazette published in the 7th or 8th century, the *Notizie scritte* which appeared in Venice in 1566, the *Avisa Relation oder Zeitung* was published in Germany in 1609, The London News Gazette was the first English language paper regularly published and appeared in 1665, the first American newspaper was the Boston News-Letter in 1704 and the first Canadian newspaper was The Halifax Gazette which debuted in 1752.

You may wish to have students concentrate on a particular period, say 1700-1900 or the early 20th century where technological development accelerated rapidly spurring the rise of media forms as well. Have students write a paper on the history of media development and illustrate it with drawings, pictures and photographs.

② Take two newspapers and compare them. They must be different types of newspapers, however, such as a mainstream publication like the Vancouver Sun, The Toronto Star, the Montreal Gazette and compared to an alternative like Now Magazine or Georgia Straight. Ideally, the two papers should be published in your community. If an alternative is not available, access the selected papers online via the Internet and conduct the comparison in that medium. Take at least two issues of each publication and examine them according to the following categories:

- Content-do the two papers carry the same content? What are the differences?
- Headlines-what is the difference in tone and style of the headlines?
- Main Stories-compare the lead stories of the two papers.



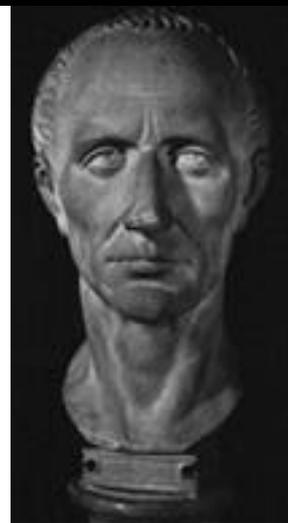
Gutenberg Press

Brainstorm

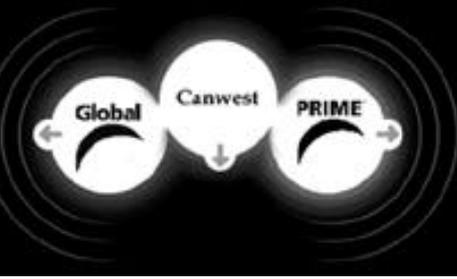
Have a discussion with your class about influences. What influences them to buy something? Or what influences them to ask their parents to buy something for them? Have students give specific examples. Were the requests fulfilled? If so, how and why? Why do students think they were influenced in this way? What was it that made them want something?

Next, have a discussion about attitudes. What influences their attitudes? Choose a range of topics with some possibilities being politicians, lawyers, the police, different cultures, the Middle East, music and musicians, and food. Restricting their answers to various media forms, have students write a short essay on how the media has an impact on personal attitudes toward a specific topic or subject. Share the essays with the rest of the class.

Finally, how do students know what's cool and what isn't? How do they know which types of clothes or brands are the ones to have as opposed to others which are out? What about specific bands and songs, make-up and hairstyles and colours? From where does the message come? How do they get their information? Can they track the source of this information back to a specific medium? If so, which one? Then, have students choose one medium that they think is the most influential from their perspective and have them list their reasons why, either orally or in writing.



Julius Caesar



Canadian Television Networks

- Editorial Departments-how many editorial departments are there and what is the range of topics covered?
- Design-describe the design and layout of the paper. What does the design say about the type of paper it is and its audience?

- Point of View/Philosophy-do the reporters and editorial writers project a particular slant or perspective in their writing? I.e., pro-government/anti-government, pro-environment or pro-business and so on.
- Use of Photographs-how are photos used to enhance a particular story? How important are the photographs to the story?
- Advertising-describe the type of advertising that appears in each of the papers. What does the advertising say about the paper and its readership.

③ Take two Canadian television channels and compare them. For example, what are the similarities and differences between a station within the Global or CTV Network as opposed to a specialty channel like History, Life, Space or Home and Garden Television? Monitor the television channels over a period of a week or two and compare according to the following categories:

- Content-what kinds of programs appear on each? How appealing is the content?
- Advertising-do the channels carry the same type of advertising? If not, what are the differences?
- Audience-based on viewing the program content and the advertising, is it possible to determine what sort of audience the channels wish to reach?
- Assessment-based on what has been viewed, what sort of world do you think is being portrayed by each of the channels? Is the view realistic? Or is the purpose only to entertain?

Write a report detailing the observations noted and list your conclusions.

④ As in question 3, take two television channels and compare them according to the same criteria and category breakdown. In this instance, however, compare a Canadian channel to one from the United States. For example, compare the CBC to CBS or CityTV to PBS. How similar or different are they? What conclusions can you draw from your observations?



Dragonball Z

⑤ Recently, we have seen large media organizations merge and converge. The largest media merger in the United States is that of AOL and Time Warner which now controls interests in broadcasting, publishing and the Internet. We have seen the Seagrams empire taken over by Vivendi SA and its distillery holdings sold off and the media companies absorbed. In Canada, Bell has taken control of CTV and the Globe & Mail while CanWest Global has bought a significant piece of Hollinger Inc., which includes both newspapers and magazines. The thinking behind these mergers appears to be at its core, two fold; that bigger is better and enhances the ability to compete; and that owning different information sources will allow these companies to deliver content/information consumers want in a variety of ways. Needless to say, these actions have both their supporters and detractors.

Set up a debate in your class where the question is something like this: Be it resolved that the concentration of media ownership in Canada is a positive development for the public at large. Select the pro and con sides and have them do their research. The class will judge which side presents the most compelling arguments.

⑥ The Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) is the regulatory and licensing body in Canada. It is the organization that grants radio, television and specialty cable licenses and sets policies and guidelines for



"Survivor" – Global network

criteria for granting licenses is the development and airing of Canadian content. Radio and television stations must produce a certain amount of Canadian content to satisfy their licensing requirements. How important is this? Do you think it is important for Canadian viewers and listeners to be exposed to content that is Canadian? Should this be forced on radio and television stations? If so, why? If not, why not? Write a paper that argues either for the Canadian content requirement or against it. Share the paper with other members of the class.

Creative Activities

Students will complete at least two of the following:

❶ Imagine that you are a journalist working for a newly “merged” media organization. You must write a story on poverty in your community. The first task is to write the story for a news broadcast that will be read on the air by an announcer. Then the article must be re-worked so it can appear in the morning edition of the newspaper. Finally, the article must be adjusted so it can be posted to the newspaper’s Web site. Write the three versions of the story and illustrate each with photos and drawings. Describe the differences in style and format of the three pieces you’ve written.

❷ You form part of the creative team behind the latest reality television show, *Concrete Jungle* (or another of your choice), where two teams must compete against each other while living in a contained environment that is completely cut off from Nature. That is, there are no rivers, lakes, trees, animals, fresh air or grass. The point of the show sees the two teams overcoming a series of obstacles and challenges that will gain them points. The team with the most points gets to leave the *Concrete Jungle*, while the other is doomed to stay until the next round where they will compete against a new team. You must write the script and storyboard the first episode of the show. The storyboard may be hand drawn or done on computer with a graphics program if available.

❸ The year is 1850 and you have formed a group to publish a newspaper in your community. Your team must go through the process of putting the newspaper together. You must decide on the roles of those in the group. Who will be the editor, sell the advertising, write the stories, design the look of the newspaper, figure out how to produce and distribute your publication? Here are some general points of reference regarding news papers.

A newspaper:

- explores news and current events
- represents the interests of the community where it is published
- has a quick turnaround time and a short life cycle
- has a look and feel that represents its focus, i.e., business (*Globe & Mail*) versus tabloid (*The National Enquirer*)
- is part of the reader’s regular routine (whether a weekly or daily)
- features in-depth content for main stories, broad coverage reflecting consumer interests
- usually a fairly large operation employing a number of people and outside services
- is subscription and advertising supported.

Have your team do a mock-up of the paper complete with finished stories and present it to the rest of the class.

❹ You and your team are producing a special event. This might be a sports spectacular, an awards show like the Academy Awards or the Juno Awards, a telethon to raise money, a national celebration such as the one that takes place on Canada Day or something else of your choice. Your goal is to obtain maximum media coverage of this event from all media: print, broadcast and Internet. This means you have to develop a promotional campaign that will attract the attention of these organizations. This could involve advertising, promotional items such as posters and flyers, a contest, a celebrity spokesperson. You and your team must first write a





plan for this promotional campaign which details how you will attract all of this media coverage and then produce the materials that you need

to generate all of the associated hoopla you need to draw attention to your event. This project needs to be thought through carefully and properly structured to be successful.

⑤ One of the concerns associated with the concentration of media ownership is the lack of diversity in the media potentially. That means alternate perspectives and points of view from organizations and other groups out of the mainstream may not be heard or seen. One positive attribute associated with the Internet is the ability for anyone, regardless of affiliation, to become a publisher and find an audience for their views and interests. You and your classmates have decided to create an E-zine that will appear on the Internet. The objective of this new publication is to present a new perspective on a particular topic. The topic is for you to decide. Will it focus on youth issues? The environment? Social justice? Music? Art? You name it. You just need the help and cooperation of your team to make it work. The development process and work is not that different from creating a print publication. You have to decide on the focus of the E-zine. What's it about and what will it cover? You need to figure out the role each team member will play? Who will be responsible for editorial, writing and the layout and design? How will this publication survive, that is, make money? Put together your first issue and post it to a Web site, either the school or class Web site or something else.

Final Project

Imagine that it is the 1940s instead of the present. You are a journalist sent to cover The Second World War. In this scenario, however, there are no newspapers or magazines, no radio, film or television. The only medium that exists is the Internet. The date is June 6th, 1944 and



it is the big event, D-Day, the invasion of Normandy by Allied forces. This is the pivotal event of the War. If it fails, the Allies may lose. You are an observer and you should be aware that you are one of many journalists covering this event and that it is a very competitive situation. Your coverage of the invasion must be timely but also have a compelling focus and point of view so that your piece stands out among all the others. For reference, search the Internet for related sites. You may wish to view the documentary series by the National Film Board entitled *Canada at War* or the opening scenes of a film like *Saving Private Ryan*. The story you write must be as detailed as possible and feature images that are also historically accurate. Once the article is done, it must be posted to a Web site so it may be read by your vast audience.

Resources

1. www.cmg.ca (Canadian Media Guild Web site)
2. www.findingfocus.com/keynotespeech.htm (John Ralston Saul speech on Public Broadcasting)
3. www.media-awareness.ca (Media Awareness Network)
4. www.carleton.ca/jmc/cujo/showcase/allnews
5. www.torstar.ca/thestar/editorial/technology2/20000823BUS01d_CRTC23.html
6. www.canoe.ca/MergerMania/jul31_canwesthollinger.html
7. www.ccpj.ca/actfile/1996/ann_de96.html
8. www.adbusters.org/magazine/28/regulator.html#top
9. www.adbusters.org/magazine/28/school.htm#top
10. www.vcn.bc.ca/media/m_paper2.html
11. Toronto Star, April 14 and 15, 2001, Section A (Media Convergence)

LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

Please forward your ideas, suggestions, and comments concerning CURRICULA.

Send information to

TEACH Magazine at:

258 Wallace Ave., Suite 206, Toronto, Ontario, M6P 3M9 or email us at: teachmag@istar.ca

Continued from page 12

Olha Pelech declares, “Can the split grades! That is a killer. The demands on an enhanced program... not only do you have to cover the curriculum but you have to provide extensions. You can barely get through the curriculum but to provide extensions? And if you have a split you have 2 or 3 units. How can you cover the curriculum and provide extensions?”

Australian resource staff say that they have only seen some grade classes, although they say that, “It makes sense to group gifted and talented kids from different grades together if that allows you to create a separate class.”

The students

The students themselves can be a big factor influencing whether or not you stay in the job. In an enhanced class, chances are you will have a student for two years in a row, and if there are some bad behaviours, the prospect of another year with that student may not be appealing. Adding to the difficulty is the perception of these classes by supply teachers. Heather Kozak says “I can’t get people to come to supply.” Rhonda Cooper also finds it nearly impossible to get a supply teacher. If one of them has a day away, support staff are pulled to cover their class. This, despite the fact that both of them think they have good kids in each of their classes.

Time

Teachers have 24 hours in a day, just like everyone else. But how does teaching a gifted class influence the amount of time invested by the teacher? A split grade requires twice the amount of time to plan as a regular grade. Either that or you only spend half the amount of time preparing per grade. Parents can eat up a significant amount of time. Preparation of IEPs requires more time. Teachers in these positions are not given any extra planning time to account for these extra responsibilities.

One thing that is different about the enhanced programs at senior public schools is that the teachers are not with the same students all day long. Laurie Johnson, is an ISSP teacher of 19 years duration at Westervelt Corners Public School in Mississauga, Ontario. This year is the first year she has been teaching the ISELP (In School Enhanced Learning Program). The enhanced students come to her twice a week for 35 minutes at a time. This seems to work very well for her. In the primary and junior levels, the teachers are with the students all day long, with the exception of their planning time (usually a gym or French period). This distinction between the amount of time spent with the students in the senior public schools may be a big factor in teachers staying in these positions. Perhaps in the primary or junior levels it might be worth having teachers spend half day with the enhanced class, half a day with the regular class. This seems to be the model used in the senior public schools and many of the half-day French immersion programs.

In Michigan, one teacher I spoke with told me that the enhanced class rotates with the other classes to “avoid teacher burnout.” She mentioned that all teachers get to work with the enhanced class, as they do with all of the other classes.



Robot: A grade two student created a robot for his presentation.

What do the students in these programs have to say?

At Greenbriar Senior Public School I mentioned to Martin Sarkar’s class that I was writing this article. I also told them that teachers don’t stay long in these positions. I wondered if the students themselves might have some insight as to why the teachers aren’t staying. One of the things the students told me was, “They get paid the same as other teachers, but they work harder.” It’s nice to know that the extra work does not go unnoticed by his class.

I asked the students what they are like to have in a class. One replied, “We need a different style of teaching - smarter kids’ attitudes are different - kids that are smarter have a more pompous attitude such as ‘I’m a pompous brat, don’t come after me’ - not me, but other kids in the class are like that.”

Another commented, “Most teachers can’t deal with us. There is an overconfidence of students even towards other students in the program and especially to those not in the program.” They also admit to not working well in a group situation. They say they are “more concerned about individual progress than group progress.” They also don’t like doing repeated work.

One student said, “If I show I can do it, why do I have to keep showing I can do it?” When asked to expand on this, the student said, “Teachers may be intimidated by us. We sometimes ask questions that kids in a normal class wouldn’t ask. We put them on the spot - they feel intimidated because they feel they should know all the answers.”

One of the most common things I find is when I go into a gifted class and say, “Any questions?” More often than not these students reply, “I have more of a comment than a question.” The students in this class were certainly no exception. They had many views on their program and some comments as to how the program could be improved.

One of the most common suggestions concerning teacher retention was, “Pay them more!” In any other business that would probably happen. However, this is a combination of



Griffen working away at his computer

government and union, so this obvious solution can't be applied. The second most common suggestion was, "Get rid of the union." Again, not an option.

Another suggestion was, "Make sure the programs get the funding." Several students came forward with stories of schools they had attended where lack of funding placed restrictions on their programs. This isn't news to Rhonda Cooper. Her budget for the year was delayed and delayed until finally she was told there was no budget. She is going through this year with no textbooks and a 300 page per month photocopy limit. That translates into 10 copies per student for the month. These things obviously do not go unnoticed by the students.

All the students questioned agreed almost unanimously that boards should, "Stop moving us around." The gifted programs seem to come and go at schools. One of the grade five students in Rhonda Cooper's class had been in four different schools in the past five years. Why are these programs always moving? Apparently, a school is not required to have a gifted program. They are, in a way, optional. Factors like space limitations in a school affect whether or not the program will run. If class space is tight and the school population is growing, contained classes are usually the first to go.

The programs are never eliminated, but have to be moved to another school. The school doesn't have to be a neighbouring school, it just has to be one in the same district. Given the size of some school boards, the distance can be significant. This means an extended bus ride for the students involved. And sometimes the schools just cannot find the staff to fill these positions.

Do the students enjoy these programs? My day at Green Glades Senior had me seeing a number of different classes during the day. When class 8-1 came in there was no indication they were an enhanced class. The teacher I was replacing left two choices for the students. Choice one was to watch a video. Choice two was to work on their personal projects. All classes that day had selected the video. However, this particular class voted unanimously to work on their personal projects. The students got up and worked all through the class with no problems. In fact, the class worked so well independently I felt as though they didn't even notice I was there. I asked one of the students why their class was working so well. He replied, "In this class we work on things that interest us.

Why wouldn't we work well?"

One grade 5 student, Taisa said, "I get along with kids more in this class. There aren't too many 'smart' enough people in the regular class, so if you are 'smarter' you are alone." She doesn't like the label others attach to her class. "People call it the nerdy class," she says. Likewise, the class often feels isolated as they are not included in most of the activities of the other grade 4 and grade 5 classes. Taisa does admit that the work can be a little hard, and sometimes she wishes she was in a regular class where the work would not be as hard. Even though it is extra work, "If I was in a regular class it would be boring," she says.

Conclusions

Efforts should be made - and are being made - to alleviate some of these problems. Some areas are dealing with the problems of split grades by moving two gifted programs to one school. Instead of two 4/5 split classes there should be single grade levels. The issue of the IEP is a little more difficult. Most teachers do not seem to enjoy working with them, and the frequent updating is seen as not necessary. Working with parents - it's something all teachers must do. However, they usually don't have to deal with all of the parents.

In Australia, Greg Wood, is an Executive Teacher Support for the New South Wales Department of School Education. Greg was a special education teacher for many years before taking his current position, which is similar to the role of a resource teacher in Ontario.

Australia uses the term OC for a class of this type, which means Opportunity Class. As far as staffing these positions, Wood says, "They don't have any problem filling them. In fact, some teachers I have known have been very disappointed not to get OC classes." He says that the government has "pushed for integration and normalization of kids with special needs" which resulted in "reductions in enrolments and more kids being integrated in mainstream classes, even though the mainstream teachers didn't really want it."

Despite the extra effort, the work is rewarding for the teachers. Olha Pelech says, "To have kids who want to come to school, who want to learn, who want to put their best foot forward, who want to know... it's just so wonderful to come to school everyday to kids who want to learn. Why would I want to leave?"

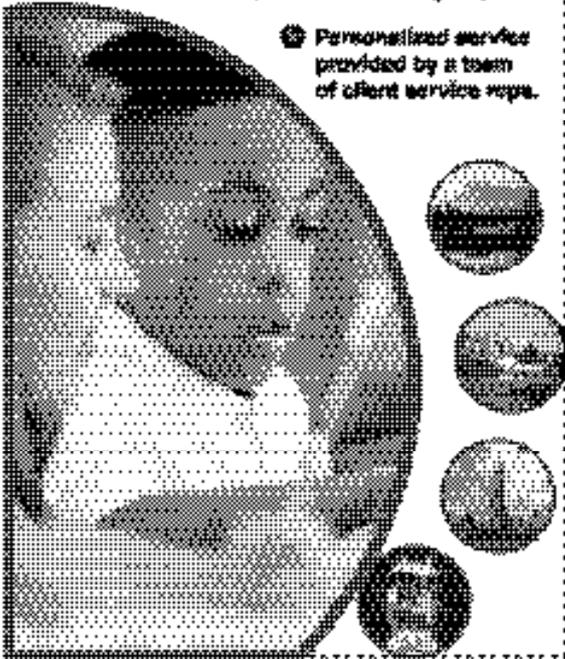
Unfortunately for Pelech, the program is being taken away from her school and being moved to another school. It is unlikely she will go with it as it will add another 25 minutes to her already lengthy commute. The kids in this program will also have to move to a new school, and probably a new teacher who will only stay with them for a year or two. Hopefully, some changes can be made to keep teachers in these classes consistently, and keep the programs running in the same schools.

David W Cooper is a supply teacher in the Peel Board of Education in Mississauga, Ontario. He also has his qualifications to teach an enhanced class. He can be reached at david@trafalgargroup.net



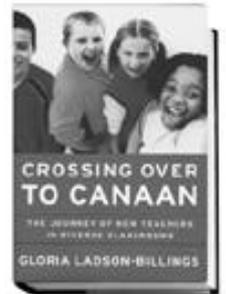
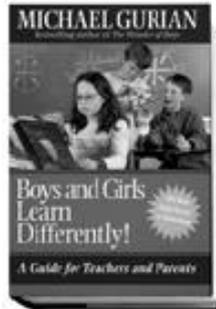
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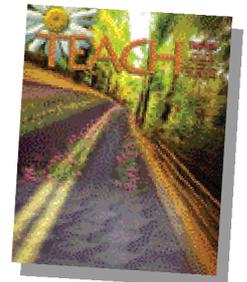
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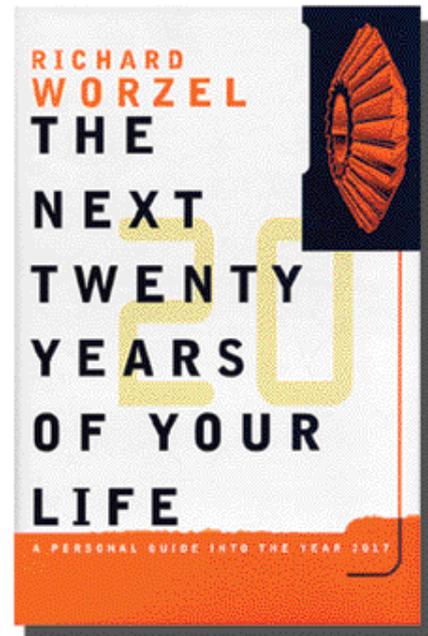
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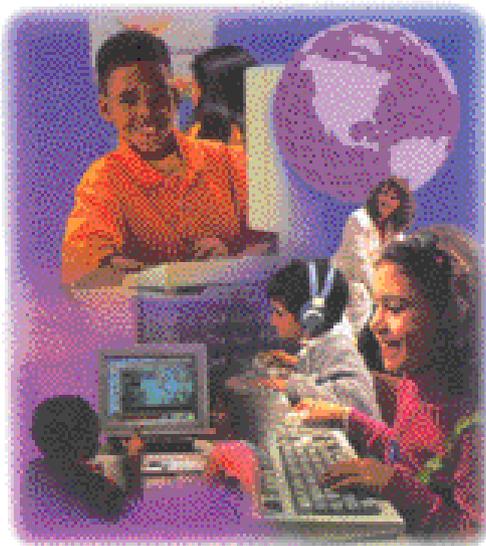
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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Arthur A. Leach School's Annual Film Production is in Full Swing

By Jeremy Simon
Editorial Sponsorship

The grade nine students are all ready in their costumes. They've learned their lines and are ready to start the next scene. If this sounds like a typical description of students preparing an annual school play, think again, for at Arthur A. Leach Junior High School, the annual school production is a full-length feature film.

For the past three years, James McLellan, an Arts and Drama teacher at Arthur A. Leach Junior High School in the Fort Garry School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba has worked with the school's grade nine students to help them script, film, and produce a 90 minute feature film that ends up being screened for the community at the local Famous Players SilverCity theatre.

"My goal is for our students to recognize and celebrate the institution of the movie," said McLellan. "If we want to cement the future for filmmaking as an art form, we need to understand the process. To understand the process, I believe we need to make filmmaking a significant event in both the school's curriculum and extracurricular activities."

The film production process actually starts in grade eight where students learn to make short five minute films using a digital camera and edit using Final Cut Pro on an Apple PowerMac G3 system. While they are learning how to script, shoot, and edit their short films, the grade eight students are also asked to start thinking and agree on a story or theme for a feature film that they will work on in grade nine.

In September, the grade nine students finalize the theme for the film. Under James McLellan's guidance they sign up for a role in the film production. For example, students who like writing get involved in developing the film's script or those who like sculpting help with spaceship or other special effects design and construction. Other roles include

costumes, storyboard, camera, props, sound, editing, assistant director, promotions, Web site support, and of course, acting as one of the film's characters.

"We schedule the film's production in three phases with pre-production in the fall, filming early in the year, and post-production editing and distribution in the Spring to Summer time frame," said McLellan. "During the first semester, I work with the kids usually after school to teach them how to use the equipment or how to prepare for their specific role in the production. Later in the year, I then tie in the film's development with the curriculum. For example, the kids practice their roles in the drama class or the two editing teams work on editing film sequences during art class." Says McLellan: "Although the students could use iMovie 2, I want them to learn



Students at work on their feature film.

to use and take full advantage of the professional software tools available such as Final Cut Pro or DigiEffects' Adobe plug-in CineLook Broadcast."

Each film produced to-date has a strong special effects component so that students can really play with the sophisticated editing features available in Final Cut Pro. The first film created three years ago was a production of Dracula, which was followed up last year with a "War 2000" alien invasion theme. This year's film, the most original to-date, is called "Time Virus". The film's story involves a girl who escapes back in time with a

duce or broaden using film as a visual creative medium at the primary school level."

As a result of James McLellan's influence, combined with the support of the Fort Garry School Division, Winnipeg may soon become the next major film development centre on the continent. To check on the production status of the Time Virus movie and learn more about Arthur A. Leach school's innovative film programs, you can visit the school's Web site at www.fgsd.winnipeg.mb.ca/aal

Jeremy Simon is a freelance writer based in Toronto.

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