

# TEACH

May/June 04 \$3.85

Education for Today and Tomorrow • L'Éducation - Aujourd'hui et Demain



Why Boys Aren't Learning

CURRICULA  
The Multiculturalism Project

Educational Governance  
*Are school boards obsolete?*

# Contents

---

## Features

---

### Why Boys Aren't Learning ..... 9

Is it girl power or is there another reason  
boys are falling behind?

— *Susan Murray*

### Educational Governance: ..... 19 Are School Boards Obsolete?

How can public school boards regain  
their former status?

— *Sabrina Mehra*



## Columns

---

### Futures ..... 5

Are Provincial Governments Destroying  
Canada's Education System?

— *Richard Worzel*

### Web Stuff ..... 7

Notable Sites for Teachers

— *Marjan Glavac*

### Computer ..... 8

Sim City 4

— *Dan Lang*

## Departments

---

### CURRICULA ..... 11

The Multiculturalism Project: India

### Ad Index ..... 23



Once again, it is difficult to believe this is the last issue of the current academic year. Time does appear to be accelerating as we stare summer in the face and turn our attention from school to more leisurely pursuits.

Not that it hasn't been a busy year.

We have covered a great many topics and presented them to you in a way which has been designed to, hopefully, help you in your daily teaching tasks while delivering the best education possible to your students.

For example, we have looked at such topics as whether teaching should be declared an essential service, speaking to those who were in favour and those who were opposed; we helped explain why Alberta does so well on standardized testing and what lessons might be taken from that; we examined class sizes, which is a very emotional issue for educators and parents who feel passionately about it and we also explored some new research that indicated there are educational benefits to video game technology—a controversial, even provocative point of view.

We have covered these areas and done so gladly, feeling they will be helpful and useful to you as you go about your day.

In this issue, we deal with some important topics with which to close out the year. The first investigates the academic achievements of boys and examines why, in virtually all areas, boys are lagging behind girls. With the exception of Math and Science (to an extent), girls are outpacing boys significantly and this lead or advantage extends beyond high school into university enrollment and career choices. It has been written in research papers and other articles that the problem had been masked by the perception that girls were being disadvantaged in schools for many years

and the focus shifted to promoting the welfare of girls in the school system to the detriment of boys. Perhaps it is time to redress the balance and focus on helping all students get ahead regardless of gender.

Equally important, in our view, is the article written about school governance. On the surface, this seems a bit dull, but, in actuality, strikes to the heart of schools and schooling. We know that school boards have declined in their ability to control educational events primarily due to the centralization of power within Ministries and Departments of Education. It is common now for all funding to come from one central source. When school boards had the ability to levy taxes, they were in control; but no longer. What can boards do to regain their former status? Read the article and find out.

Finally, in an attempt to deal with contemporary issues (racism and discrimination in particular), and as a response to a recent spate of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents, we give you The Multiculturalism Project as the teacher resource for your in-class use. We hope this will become a series of resources that will explore different cultures in a meaningful way. In this issue, we look at the country and people of India, an ancient and highly sophisticated civilization.

Wili Liberman

### Next Issue

- Focus on Healthy Living and Active Lifestyle Choices
- Futures, Curricula and more

# TEACH

## MAGAZINE

**Publisher / Editor:**  
Wili Liberman

**Associate Editor:**  
Noa Glouberman

**Contributing Writers:**  
Marjan Glavac, Dan Lang,  
Sabrina Mehra, Susan Murray,  
Richard Worzel

**Advertising Manager:**  
Michele Newton Benson

**Art Direction:**  
Vinicio Scarci

**Designer / Production:**  
Katarzyna Kozbiel

**Circulation:**  
Susan Holden

**Editorial Intern:**  
Krista Glen

**Editorial Advisory Board:**  
John Fielding  
*Professor of Education,  
Queen's University (retired)*

George Goodwin  
*Managing Director,  
Historica Foundation of Canada*

John Myers  
*Curriculum Instructor,  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/  
University of Toronto*

Rose Dotten  
*Directory of Library and Information Services,  
University of Toronto Schools*

[www.teachmag.com](http://www.teachmag.com)

TEACH is published by 1454119 Ontario Ltd. Printed in Canada. All rights reserved. Subscriptions are available at a cost of \$18.95 plus \$1.32 GST including postage and handling by writing our office, 258 Wallace Ave. Ste. 206 Toronto, Ontario M6P 3M9 E-mail: [info@teachmag.com](mailto:info@teachmag.com) Tel (416) 537-2103, Fax (416) 537-3491. Unsolicited articles, photographs and artwork submitted are welcome but TEACH cannot accept responsibility for their return. Contents of this publication may be reproduced for teachers' use in individual classrooms without permission. Others may not reproduce contents in any way unless given express consent by TEACH. Although every precaution is taken to ensure accuracy, TEACH, or any of its affiliates, cannot assume responsibility for the content, errors or opinions expressed in the articles or advertisements and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any damages whatsoever. Canadian publication mail sales product agreement No. 195855. ISSN No. 1198-7707.



# Reality check!

Evaluating Online Information



Canada

This project was made possible by a financial contribution from Industry Canada's SchoolNet Program.



Help students analyse what they find on the Web

Reality Check! offers:

- Strategies for authenticating information and optimizing searches
- Teachers' guide with handouts and exercises
- Independent Study Unit with interactive assignments
- Slide presentation for in-class discussion on copyright, plagiarism, bias and more

To preview or order **Reality Check!**, call 1-800-896-3342 or visit [www.realitycheckforstudents.ca](http://www.realitycheckforstudents.ca)

## Adobe® Education

FREE online curriculum resources for educators

### The Adobe Education Curriculum Exchange

Created by educators for educators, these classroom-tested curricula will help you integrate Adobe technology into your classroom. Have students create a topic-based Web site for a history project, study color theory, begin to use 3D software (Adobe® Atmosphere™), develop digital diaries, create visual effects, use visual imagery in math class, and more.

### Adobe Digital Video Curriculum Guide

27 modules help students develop a solid foundation from which they can complete professional video projects using Adobe Photoshop®, Adobe Premiere® Pro, Adobe After Effects®, Adobe Audition™ and Adobe Encore™ DVD.

### Adobe Acrobat® 6.0 Curriculum Guide

This guide is a rich resource of lessons, project files, and interactive exercises. Show your students how to use Acrobat 6.0 to create, edit, and share Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files.



### New lessons now available online

Boost your teaching power with free lessons, course guides, and projects that incorporate Adobe tools. Visit [www.adobe.com/education/curriculum](http://www.adobe.com/education/curriculum) and view or download all the free resources.

[www.adobe.com/education/curriculum](http://www.adobe.com/education/curriculum)



Tools for the New Work™

# Are provincial governments destroying Canada's education system?



By Richard Worzel

**W**here does the future lie for today's students in tomorrow's workplace? You have undoubtedly read that China and India are scooping up jobs from developed countries. Possible for decades, this has really only taken off within the last five years, and it is happening for two reasons. Both China and India have seen the advantages of opening their economies up to international competition, which destroys many of their obsolete industries and the concomitant jobs, but creates new, better paying jobs in their stead. And, second, the telecommunications revolution has caused the price of international telephony to drop from dollars per minute to pennies per minute and the Internet has made it possible for colleagues in distant locations to work together. As a result, both China and India are ramping up to offer services to organizations throughout the developed world, including Canada, at prices substantially lower than domestic workers can do work of comparable quality. This follows the pattern already set in manufacturing, where a worker in a textile factory in Vietnam, for instance, will work for the equivalent of about 18¢US an hour, compared with 50 to 100 times as much for a worker in a textile factory in North America.

Meanwhile, in order to stay in business in the face of increased competition both from home and abroad, Canadian companies are increasing their use of

computers, robots, and automation wherever possible in order to keep their costs low. Often, the alternative is to ship the work to places like China or India where workers will do it for substantially less money, or go out of business. Either way, it means less work for traditional employees in developed countries. There's even a cliché to describe this process: "Automate, emigrate or evaporate."

In fact, what is happening throughout the developed world is that all routine work is disappearing, and is either being done by machines or by cheaper workers in emerging countries.

There are two primary responses to these developments. The first is to call for protection for Canadian workers, either by invoking some kind of trade/tariff barrier or by asking that governments penalize companies that downsize or outsource to other countries. This is very much like responding to poison ivy by scratching it: it seems like a good idea but actually makes things much worse. In fact, if you look at the statistics you will find two interesting things about job migration. First, Canada is a net importer of jobs from the U.S. We are, in fact, number five on the list of countries that take jobs from American workers. If we are going to get into the protectionist business, we had better be prepared to stop taking American jobs. Second, our economy is creating more jobs than we are losing, and the jobs we're creating pay better than the jobs going offshore. In short, we are upgrading the jobs our economy offers tomorrow's workers – provided they have the proper skills; those without the proper skills may never find work – a real problem that should be addressed through retraining.

This leads to the second, healthier reaction to the change in the job market: the proper response to increasing competition in the global labour market

is to improve the education of Canadian workers, including the education of today's students. This will enable them to compete more successfully and to earn higher incomes than earlier generations. The key point is that with all the routine work disappearing from Canada, we need workers that can do non-routine work: innovative, creative, inventive work. So how do we produce inventive people?

To do this we need an education system that teaches creativity, identifies the unique talents of each individual student and helps them develop such talents. We can't do that with standardized education and standardized testing. "Back to basics" is a 19<sup>th</sup> century prescription for failure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for while the basics are necessary, they are a long way from being enough.

Let's turn to the front lines of education: what's the best way to teach a student? Heaven knows there has been enough research and ink wasted (excuse me: "invested") in that question to sink several boats, but I think I know the only correct answer: it depends. The best way to teach a student depends on the student. How does she best learn? Where is she in her intellectual and emotional development? What learning strategies will work best for her right now? It also depends on the teacher. What teaching strategies is the teacher best at using? How can he best appeal to this student? How does he interact, intellectually and emotionally, with this student? If you can answer those questions, you're pretty well along toward answering the question of what's the best way to teach that student at that time in that situation.

So the next question is: who is the best person to decide how best to teach a student, especially for a future that will reward individuality and creativity on a base of sound fundamentals?

I submit that it is the teacher in the classroom, not the local board of education and certainly not the ministry of education of the provincial government. Yet, the trend in education in this country is toward taking power away from school boards, schools and teachers, and centralizing control in the hands of provincial bureaucrats. In turn, this leads to standardization – the mass production of school children in an era when mass production is obsolete.

Why are the provinces intruding ever further into education now? Well, first, it is because education has become highly politicized over the last 15 years, which means there are political points to be won (and lost!) in education. Accordingly, provincial politicians feel forced to insert themselves into education. And the reason why there's political hay to be made in education is the general public has gradually come to an awareness of how important education is and will be to the future of the workforce, and hence to Canada as a whole. Moreover, there is a vague sense our education system is failing, which produces dissatisfaction.

Provincial governments answer this dissatisfaction with promises to take control, increase standards and generally improve education. I believe ministries of education can do these

things. Once a ministry, however, gets a taste of control, it encourages them to take over budgets, curricula, testing and, eventually, teaching methods. It can even degenerate into micro-managing how teachers teach from class to class. I think this is horribly destructive precisely because it leads to regimented, standardized education. Without a constitutional amendment, however, provincial governments have the final say in education.

So, if it were up to me, what role would I ask provincial ministries of education to fill? Well, first, I would ask them to go national and international, reading some of the mountains of research performed in education and identifying best practices proven in classrooms anywhere in the developed world. Next, I'd work with my counterparts in other Canadian governments to help develop (a) what techniques are likely to work best in Canada and (b) what curricula are most likely to be of greatest use and relevance to today's students. Both are areas where cross-fertilization can be of value. Then I'd collaborate with teachers in my own province to work out the details of learning techniques based on the research reviewed and the curricula to be imparted, including ways of identifying and encouraging individual creativity. Then I'd ask

teachers, parents and students to help reach a consensus on how schools and teachers should be held accountable. In other words, how can we tell when the system is working properly and when a school, a region or a teacher needs additional support?

Once I had benchmarks defined, I would ask school boards to guide the education of local students to fill local needs and ask individual schools and teachers to teach the way they thought best for individual students. In other words, you set targets and provide tools and techniques at the macro level, and leave teachers to decide how best to work with individual students, holding teachers accountable for the results but letting them decide how to teach.

That is how you play to the strengths of all four levels: province, school board, school and teacher. To do anything less (or anything more, for that matter) risks destroying the economic future of our students, and our country.

---

*Richard Worzel is Canada's leading futurist and the author of the recent bestseller, "Who Owns Tomorrow?" He volunteers his time to speak to high school students as his schedule permits. Contact him at [futurist@futuresearch.com](mailto:futurist@futuresearch.com).*



**JULY 8 – 10, 2004  
SHERATON CENTRE  
TORONTO**



Canadian School Boards Association  
L'Association canadienne des conseils scolaires

#### **#1 Dr. Michael Fullan and Glenn Tecker**

We've lined up Dr. Michael Fullan, Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and Glenn Tecker of Tecker Consultants as our keynote speakers. Acknowledged among the world's foremost experts on leadership, strategy and change, their presentations will focus on the strategies and skills required for trustees to lead their school boards into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### **#2 Jessica Holmes!**

Laugh over lunch with one of Canada's top comedic talents. This Ottawa native has received Gemini and Canadian Comedy Award nominations for her performances at the Just For Laughs Festival and the infamous Second City. She's the newest cast member on The Royal Canadian Air Farce and starred in her own sketch comedy series on CTV, The Holmes Show, where she brought to life hilarious characters and impressions.

#### **#3 Why re-invent the wheel if you don't have to - Network!**

Get the national perspective on education, compare notes with your colleagues from across Canada, get answers to your questions. We're lining

up discussion-type workshops and plenaries, a resource fair of national products and services, a banquet dinner and a companion program that will provide a taste of the sights and sounds of Toronto and the lovely Niagara region!

**GET INFORMATION AND REGISTER 24  
HOURS A DAY ON OUR WEB SITE AT  
[WWW.CDNSBA.ORG](http://WWW.CDNSBA.ORG)**

**MARK JULY 8 – 10, 2004 ON YOUR  
CALENDAR AND BOOK YOUR HOTEL  
EARLY!**

**OFFICIAL CONGRESS HOTEL:  
SHERATON CENTRE TORONTO  
1-800-325-3535**

**SEE YOU IN TORONTO!**



## SchoolHistory.co.uk

**SchoolHistory.co.uk**

[www.schoolhistory.co.uk](http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk)

The Association of Teachers Web sites, created by teachers for teachers, contain free, high quality teaching resources and materials and are comprehensive and user-friendly. This site, a member, features eight interactive games for students Grades 5 to 12.

All eight games on the site integrate questions from different historical periods into fun learning activities. In Walk the Plank, for example, students choose from 67 topics to try to make their teacher walk the plank!

Reviewed Internet Links is a useful feature containing an annotated review of practical, classroom-friendly Web sites. Often, recommended Web sites are too complex for students or have few or no student-friendly resources. With over 1,000 reviews of historical Internet links this is the exception, and will undoubtedly save many teachers hours of research.

Online History Lessons is another great feature of the site. These full, mini and revision interactive history lessons are designed to catch and hold a student's attention and may be supplemented with over 650 downloadable worksheets and 80 PowerPoint presentations. After their lesson, students can take interactive quizzes to test their knowledge on specific history topics. The quizzes come in many forms including sliding puzzles (reconstructing famous images), historical pairs and match-up.

This site also features a section just for teachers, which includes lesson ideas, case studies and a discussion forum.

## ScienceMaster

**ScienceMaster**

[www.sciencemaster.com](http://www.sciencemaster.com)

A science learning Web site for students, parents and teachers containing information, news, links, pictures, products and services with content from NASA, the USGS, the EPA, NOAA and leading post-secondary institutions. Formed in 1977, ScienceMaster's goal is to excite young minds about science by integrating information, communication and community with compelling products and services in a fun-to-use Internet network.

Three links on each of the site's main pages – Homework Helper, Jumpstart Science Topics and Learning Galleries – provide information for study or fun. Homework Helper includes the Periodic Table of Elements, a scientific calculator, a sunrise/sunset calculator, a science glossary and more. Jumpstart Science Topics contains one-page fact sheets under several categories: Space, Life, Earth and Physical Science. Each category includes dozens of science topics. Each of the site's Learning Galleries features a collection of images relating to geology, astronomy, biology, medicine and physical science.

The site itself is made up of five main topics: Space, Life, Earth, Physical and Technology. Each topic contains informative articles on everything from stories in the news, to biographies of famous scientists, to what a geologist does, to what it takes to pursue a career in science. There are also columns and articles written by teachers, learning professionals, scientists and parents, a monthly newsletter with archived back issues, links to other science sites and lots of free stuff, including images, sound files and software.

## The Learning Box

**The Learning Box**

[www.learningbox.com/i\\_index.htm](http://www.learningbox.com/i_index.htm)

This site offers students K (with assistance) to Grade 6 hands-on shockwave and flash activities covering math, science and language arts.

Manny's Rumba, for example, is a base-10 blocks activity using blocks of varying numbers (one, 10 and 100) to reinforce primary students' use of the base-10 block manipulative. BT Bear's Catch 10, a fun, interactive game, helps students recognize the "one" blocks. Flowering Fractions, the most challenging of the bunch, emphasizes fractions and would make a great review for Grade 6 students. The level of difficulty increases each time the player successfully matches all the "fraction petals" to the correct flower, making it whole.

The Case of the Watermelon Patch Mystery teaches students idioms by asking them to match sentence halves to make complete such common phrases as: "A stitch in time saves nine," "All that glitters is not gold" and "Two wrongs don't make a right." Investigating Air, an interactive science activity, teaches primary students about objects that float and wind power.

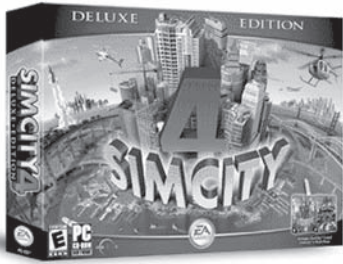
These and other fun, educational activities on the site can be easily integrated into the curriculum and would make wonderful additions to "buddy programs" between senior and primary students.

---

*Marjan Glavac is author of "The Busy Educator's Guide To The World Wide Web." He can be reached at [marjan@glavac.com](mailto:marjan@glavac.com) or [www.glavac.com](http://www.glavac.com).*

# Sim City 4

By Dan Lang



Simulation is one of the most powerful applications of learning designed software currently available: business programs use the case-study method to promote learning through exposure to real-life situations and, as part of their learning experience, pilots practice using flight simulators – grounded versions of the real thing. Kids, too, can reap the benefits of learning through simulation with Sim City, one of the very first and most continuously popular simulation software programs ever built.

Sim City 4, the most recent evolution of Sim City, is perfect for anyone 10 and up who loves to experiment, tinker and build. Sim City 4 gives you the chance to become chief architect and mayor of a city you are responsible for building and managing. As you build up your city, you attract SIMs – simulated citizens – who decide to come and live in your city. These SIMs have lives of their own and their activities – building houses, stores and factories – generate a tax base that, in turn, allows you to further develop your town.

The more the SIMs like what you are doing, the more will come to inhabit your city. Conversely, if, for example, your city has an inadequate infrastructure or your taxes are too high, the SIMs won't be happy and they'll leave.

So, how does this all work? When you first open the program, you have a view of a large track of land and access to 16 function buttons on the control panels around the edge of the screen. These allow you to carry out your work as architect and mayor. You get started by building roads and dividing your

land into residential, commercial and industrial areas. Then, you install power stations and lines to supply the city with electricity.

Once you have installed these basics, you bring the city to life by running the simulation. This part of the game is like watching a movie unfold before your eyes. When the SIMs move in, they build houses, stores and factories. All of this activity creates a growing need for land – residential, commercial and industrial. In addition, the program updates you as to what is happening as a result of the SIMs' activity, including emerging issues of growth, like water shortages, inadequate number of hospital beds, rising crime rates, etc.

The next step is to install other essential services like water, a waste removal system, police and fire departments, etc. You may also respond (if you choose) to emerging issues in your city. You'll start to notice all kinds of demands for schools, zoos, farmland and other infrastructural elements that you can add. But don't forget: you also have a budget to manage. Make your choices and see what happens.

Your advisors (city councillors), report back to you on what is happening in your city and what they think needs to be done. Their input is valuable but, ultimately, you're the one making the decisions around here. And there are many things that need your attention: floods, fires, pollutions, visits from UFOs, just to mention a few. You are succeeding if your population (and tax base) is growing and you are effectively responding to the challenges that arise.

Sim City 4 is a major improvement over the earlier version, Sim City 3000. The graphic detail is significantly improved, allowing you to zoom in and see the nuts and bolts of your city up close. Sim City 4 also allows you to connect cities, enabling you to build what will eventually become interdependant cities. In addition, you

can now also track the individual lives of your citizens (the SIMs) and import SIM characters if you have the SIM program.

This program has many layers of engaging complexity. It also includes a tutorial that leads you through the basics of building a city to help you get started. We strongly suggest you do the tutorial; invest the time to learn how to correctly operate the program. You also have the option to start with a pre-designed city rather than from scratch.

Sim City 4 offers many valuable experiences, from gathering information to identifying choices to making decisions to seeing the consequences and trade-offs as a result of your actions. First and foremost, this is a valuable life learning experience, with learning about city management almost secondary. Good simulation is very compelling and an engaging way to learn.

Sim City 4 requires a willingness to learn the mechanics of the program and is best for kids and adults who are prepared to make the initial effort. Given that, however, you have a program that can provide you with a seemingly endless path of experimentation and construction.

---

*Dan Lang is a freelance writer based in Toronto and the founder of Learning Village. He may be reached at [lang@dlang.com](mailto:lang@dlang.com).*

**Publisher:** Maxis Electronic Arts

**Learning Areas:** Dynamics of and strategies for social and economic planning and decision making, or what it is like to build and run a city. Develops analytic and systematic thinking skills and a very thorough understanding of what is involved in building and managing a complex enterprise.

**Grades:** 5 and up

**Minimum Requirements:** Windows XP/ME/2000/98 (Windows 95/NT not supported) or Mac OS X 10.2 or later

**Ordering Info:** 1-800-250-9229

or [www.cdromstore.com](http://www.cdromstore.com)



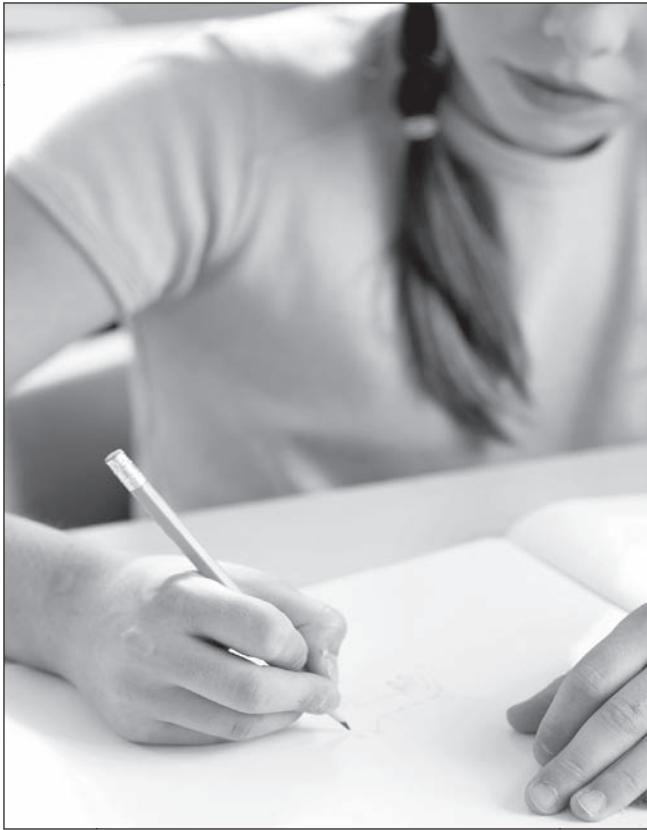


# Why Boys Aren't Learning

By Susan Murray

**T**he concept that boys and girls learn differently is not new. Often, what a student naturally enjoys or is inclined toward will determine his or her success in various school subjects; but what if today's classroom and curriculum structure catered (however unintentionally) to one gender more than the other? Many researchers say this is now the case, with boys facing an upward struggle from primary school on.

For many boys, co-educational public schools can be uncomfortable, unfriendly, unproductive places. Teaching styles and disciplinary habits are often not suited to the average boy and may “lock him into a terrible cycle of punishment and bad behaviour,” writes Dr. William Pollack, a professor at Harvard Medical School and author of *Real Boys: Rescuing our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*. In learning environments biased against their strengths, boys may become turned off or frustrated and may attempt to have their needs met by seeking negative attention. This rebellion completes the circle of failure, Pollack argues, with many boys labelled as troublemakers or diagnosed with hyperactivity.



If Pollack is right, schools may need to upgrade many traditional teaching methods; but what about the girls?

Girls' education has been a major focus for researchers since the early 1970s. In 1992, the American Association of University Women published a report called "How Schools Shortchange Girls." The report's claim of a "girl crisis" was widely publicized, the Ms. Foundation declared a "Take our Daughters to Work Day" and the U.S. Congress passed the \$360-million Gender Equity in Education Act. More recently,

a similar "gender gap" in education – with boys falling to the bottom of the heap. The study reveals that girls, due to a concerted effort, have made steady gains in math and science while outperforming boys in reading and writing.

According to an international study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Unesco, the problem of boys' underachievement in literacy is worldwide. The 2003 study suggests that girls out-performed boys in reading at the age of 15 in all 43 countries that participated in the study. Boys were ahead in math and, when it came to science, there was some evidence of a gender gap. In almost all of the countries involved, girls had higher expectations when it came to job prospects and were more likely to see themselves as white-collar workers than boys.

Why the gender gap? The traditional way North American schools teach boys puts them at risk of underachieving, writes Michael Gurian, educator, child advocate and author of *Boys and Girls Learn Differently!* In his book, Gurian argues that reading and writing skills do not come as naturally to boys as to girls. Many problems experienced by boys in the classroom stem from them being normal boys in a setting that is not designed to handle them, he writes. Educators often lack understanding of "typical boy traits" like aggression, verbal and emotional reticence, and interest in objects moving through space. An early elementary school student can learn extensive math, geometry, problem solving and social skills from LEGO, building blocks and woodworking projects. According to Gurian, current curricula and classroom structures deny boys these opportunities.

American educational researchers William Draves and Julie Coates also blame traditional school structure for holding boys back. In their book, *Nine-Shift: Work, Life and Education in the 21st Century*, they argue that boys are leading society

## ***the latest statistics indicate boys are in danger of failing, not girls***

well-publicized studies and books - like 1995's *Reviving Ophelia* by Mary Pipher - have argued that school systems put girls at a disadvantage.

However, the latest statistics indicate boys are in greater danger of failing, not girls. In 2001, the Toronto District School Board reported that 10 per cent more girls than boys achieved Level 3 or 4 (4 being the highest) in standardized reading and writing tests in Grades 3 and 6; and girls were holding their own in math, too. In Alberta today, boys maintain a slight edge in math and science but lag far behind girls in language arts. Other provinces report similar gaps.

A recent University of Chicago study, combining the results of six major surveys on educational achievement spanning 30 years and involving thousands of children, also indicates

into the Internet age. According to them, it is not boys who are the problem, but schools. While boys are developing the skills they will need in the "knowledge jobs" of the future, schools are still preparing students for an industrial age that is passing. Draves and Coates believe schools in the U.S. had to go through a similar adjustment between 1900 and 1920, as the education system adapted to produce in students the skills needed for industrial and office work instead of jobs in the rural economy. During this period, boys dropped out of school in huge numbers. Yet it was often those same young men, experimenting with technology, who led America's manufacturing boom.

• *Continued on page 17*

# Curricula

Reproducible Insert

## THE MULTICULTURALISM PROJECT



**C**anada is a country that thrives on diversity and is the first nation in the world to pass a law affirming that multiculturalism is a core value of Canadian society. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act, was enacted by Parliament in 1988. It is a piece of legislation that builds on the Citizenship Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Official Languages Act and draws from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

What is the purpose of such legislation? It ensures that the rights of those who come from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds are protected and preserved. This leads to greater awareness, understanding and communication between varied communities. When despicable events occur, as they have, most recently as anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim actions, the response of the community at large is one of moral indignation and even outrage. The community speaks with a single voice when it condemns discriminatory attacks and responds in a positive way by coming

together to voice its concerns and support those who have been maliciously targeted. We are saying that racist and discriminatory acts do not represent us and, furthermore, we want no part of them. Such things do not belong here. No environment should support discrimination or racism.

According to the latest census data compiled by Statistics Canada, there are over 200 ethnic groups now represented by the Canadian population – a rich and varied cultural mosaic. Each year, roughly a quarter of a million people from around the world come to live in Canada. In the year 2001, foreign-born Canadians comprised some 18 per cent of the population. Immigration now contributes more to the population than the national birth rate, which is in decline. Visible minorities comprise roughly 13.4 per cent of the Canadian population and that figure rises when examining urban areas like Vancouver and Toronto where visible minorities comprise 37 per cent of the population.



The promotion of multiculturalism embraces three primary areas:

- *Identity:* fostering a society that recognizes, respects and reflects a diversity of cultures where people of all backgrounds feel a sense of belonging and attachment to Canada.
- *Social Justice:* building a society that ensures fair and equitable treatment and respects the dignity of people of all origins.
- *Civic Participation:* developing among Canada's diverse population active citizens who have the opportunity and the capacity to help shape the future of their communities and their country.



### SCHOOLS ARE NOW THE UNITED NATIONS

Schools represent the community in all its aspects, and this includes diversity. Given the three primary areas of multiculturalism listed above, we can further say that the more finite aspects of this policy focus on the following areas:

- *Fostering cross-cultural understanding:* understand cultural difference and allow that integration into Canadian culture, in urban and rural communities.
- *Combatting racism and discrimination:* encouraging Canadians to find positive ways to discourage and stop racial discrimination.
- *Promoting shared citizenship:* ensuring all Canadians feel part of Canada and can take part in its economic, cultural and social life.
- *Making Canadian institutions more reflective of Canadian diversity:* ensuring that public institutions are responsive to and representative of a diverse population.

We at TEACH Magazine are undertaking what we hope will constitute a series of lesson plans that explore many aspects of multiculturalism as well as a variety of cultures, their histories, origins, arts and sciences.

The first culture we have elected to explore is that of India; a vast, beautiful and ancient land with a fascinating history and burgeoning citizenry.

### General Curriculum Links

World History, Social Studies, English/Language Arts, Geography, Global Studies, Global Geography and Media Studies.

We have divided the lesson plan into two distinct parts: Junior (Grades 5-7)/Intermediate (Grades 8-10) and Senior (Grades 11-12).

### INTRODUCTION TO LESSON: EXPLORING INDIA

With a population of just over 1 billion people, India is the largest democracy in the world. A country of rich diversity and cultural complexity, India is a sophisticated civilization that has evolved over thousands of years.

### Quick Facts

- The name "India" comes from the river Indus, whose surrounding valleys were the home of early settlers.
- The number system was created in India.
- Chess was invented in India.
- Algebra, trigonometry and calculus originated in India.
- The place value system and decimal system were developed in 100 BC in India.
- Snakes and Ladders was created by the 13<sup>th</sup> century poet-saint Gyandev.
- India has the most post offices in the world.
- The world's largest employer is the Indian railway system, which has over 1 million workers.
- The world's first university was established in Takshila in 700 BC where over 10,500 students from all over the world studied more than 60 subjects.
- The first school of medicine was established in India 2,500 years ago.
- The art of navigation and navigating originated in India over 6,000 years ago.



- The value of  $\pi$  was first calculated by the Indian mathematician Budhayana, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.
- Until 1896, India was the only source of diamonds in the world.
- The Baily Bridge, built in the Ladakh Valley in August 1892, is the highest bridge in the world.
- Sushruta, regarded as the father of modern surgery, performed cataract operations, created artificial limbs, performed caesarian births, repaired fractures and conducted plastic and brain surgery 2,600 years ago.
- The use of anesthesia was widespread in ancient Indian medicine.
- The average age in India is 24.1 years.
- The life expectancy is 63.62 years.
- There are seven dominant religions: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi.
- There are 14 official languages in India; Hindi is the national language and English is used in politics and business.
- The literacy rate is 59.5 per cent.
- The capital of India is New Delhi.

## Sources

[www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/in.html#geo](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/in.html#geo)  
[www.indianchild.com/amazing\\_facts\\_of\\_India.htm](http://www.indianchild.com/amazing_facts_of_India.htm)

## JUNIOR/INTERMEDIATE LESSON

This lesson asks students to work in groups to produce a storyboard (and an actual video if time and equipment are available) for a short presentation. Students will learn many important skills, not the least of which is how to work co-operatively and productively as a team.

This lesson integrates many subject areas including history, geography, writing, art, design, technology and media.

## OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Students will:

- analyze a video clip for its effectiveness and content;
- research using the Internet for relevant information;

- create a storyboard, including illustrations and script, for a short video;
- understand how to work co-operatively with classmates;
- present orally their display and discuss what they have learned from their research and work;
- explore the rich culture of India.

### Equipment

- Computers with Internet capabilities and colour printers
- Large pieces of newsprint or chart paper
- Rulers, markers, pencils for drawing
- Map of the world or atlas
- Video camera and supporting equipment (if these are available; otherwise, produce the storyboards on large pieces of newsprint or chart paper and use these for the presentation)

### Process

- Show the whole class a five to 10 minute video clip on India. The video clip may come from a music video, a Bollywood production (available from a local video outlet) or mainstream films like Gandhi, Bollywood Bollywood, Passage to India or Bend It Like Beckham. Discuss the content of the video clip. What did the students think when they viewed it? What was the story line? Also, discuss the structure of the video clip. How is a sense of story created? What elements in the video clip were compelling? Could it have been done any differently? What makes the video clip effective?
- Explain to the class that you want them to work in film production teams of four or five students to make a video from a storyboard exploring one of the following themes:
  - music of India
  - religion of India
  - dance in India
  - painting in India
  - theater in India

Show your class examples of storyboards. Please see:

[www.storyboards-east.com](http://www.storyboards-east.com)

[movies.warnerbros.com/twister/cmp/storyboards.html](http://movies.warnerbros.com/twister/cmp/storyboards.html)

[www.exposure.co.uk/eejit/storybd](http://www.exposure.co.uk/eejit/storybd)



Establish clear criteria for the video production:

- Present solid factual information about the topic;
- Include a story about a person illustrating one of the themes;
- If applicable, show on a map the regions within India where the theme is applicable;
- Feature an example of a North American equivalent to the chosen theme;
- Use a storyboard with illustrations and a script;
- The length of the video should not be more than three minutes.

When the storyboards and/or videos are completed, each group should present their project to the class and discuss what they were trying to do and what they learned about their topic.

Finally, each individual should write a paper describing what they learned, what they think about their topic and record their thoughts on how they learned about their topic.

### ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Evaluate each group on the video they produced. Criteria to consider include:

- *Content:* is the theme thoroughly researched and presented?
- *Thoroughness:* are all criteria met?
- *Effectiveness:* is the story element effectively and creatively presented?
- *Teamwork:* did students work effectively as a team?
- *Effort:* did the members of the team work in a dedicated and co-operative manner, maximizing the talents of the individuals within the group?



Assess the students individually on their:

- *Knowledge of the chosen theme*; a written test of common knowledge may be useful
- *Co-operation, decision-making and research skills*
- *Presentation and discussion skills*

## SENIOR LESSON

In this lesson for older students, the class investigates and explores the media for its influences over perceptions, stereotyping and even social satire. The class is organized into teams to complete media-related tasks as they relate to perceptions of India and East Indians. The tasks comprise of a series of inter-related activities that lead students through a process that will allow them to draw conclusions and present their findings to the rest of the class in written form and orally.

## OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Understand how the media shapes and influences perceptions, opinions and attitudes
- Research using the Internet for relevant information
- Recognize the characteristics of racism and discrimination
- Make recommendations as to how to combat racism and discrimination
- Learn about the difficulties some visible minorities face
- Work co-operatively in teams
- Make recommendations and support those recommendations with a sound rationale.

## Equipment

- Access to computers with Internet capability
- Presentation materials

## Process

Divide your students into teams of four or five. Explain to them that they will be investigating issues related to racism and discrimination as they are applied to the East Indian or Indo-Canadian population in Canada. They will be examining the history of this community and the challenges it has faced since first establishing itself early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in British Columbia. After the students

have done their initial research, they will present their findings to the class.

Have your student teams conduct Internet searches on the following keywords and phrases:

- Indo-Canadians
- The Singh Decision
- Komagata Maru Incident
- History of Sikhs in Canada
- East Indians in Canada

Useful Web sites:

[www.omnitv.ca/news/minorityreport/20040402\\_story05.shtml](http://www.omnitv.ca/news/minorityreport/20040402_story05.shtml)

[www.equalityrights.org/cera/docs/globe.html](http://www.equalityrights.org/cera/docs/globe.html)

[http://collections.ic.gc.ca/heirloom\\_series/volume7/countries/India.html](http://collections.ic.gc.ca/heirloom_series/volume7/countries/India.html)



The student teams will write up their research findings and collectively prepare a brief summary presentation. Each member of the team will present their own findings to the rest of the team. Then, the team will work together to consolidate the findings and present them orally to the rest of the class. The summary points presented to the class should be no more than a page.

Next, the student teams will monitor the media for coverage that relates to East Indians or Indo-Canadians. Each team should decide what media will be monitored and by who. That is, one team member may cover newspapers, another magazines, one looks at the Internet while another may monitor television and video. The idea is to keep a log for a period of at least a week to 10 days and document the media coverage found relating specifically to East Indians. This may also include whether any East Indians were journalists for the newspapers or magazines read or actors on the television programs or videos watched.

Students must then summarize the content of that media coverage, the perspective, tone and impression



**The Simpsons' Apu**

left with the reader/user/viewer. The media coverage relating to television, for example, may include such programming as *The Simpsons* or *Seinfeld* rather than news or current affairs shows. If such programs are included, students must be prepared to discuss whether satirical content is a positive or negative influence on viewers and give a sound rationale for their argument.

After the seven to 10 day media monitoring period has ended, the student teams reconvene to discuss and present their findings to each other. What have they discovered? Each team will then summarize their findings and put together an oral presentation for the rest of the class.

Essentially, students must determine if the coverage they witnessed presented East Indians in a positive or negative light and explain how this impression was created. Did the media coverage explore the issues of racism or discrimination or, in fact, contribute to these issues? How does popular culture contribute to the overall perception of East Indians and is this a constructive influence or not?

The student teams should make use of different materials to create a high quality presentation. This may consist of creating a Web site, putting together something in PowerPoint, developing a storyboard or some other presentation form. In addition to visual elements, a detailed report of at least two pages should accompany the presentation and be handed in to the teacher.

Assess the students individually on their:

- *Knowledge:* the challenges faced by Indo-Canadians historically and presently, and how they are presented in the media
- *Co-operation, decision-making and research skills*
- *Presentation and discussion skills*



## ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Evaluate students on the quality of their presentations.

Suggested criteria include:

- *Content:* is the issue thoroughly researched and presented?
- *Thoroughness:* have all the criteria been met as outlined in the objectives/outcomes?
- *Effectiveness:* are the recommendations valid and supported by a thoughtful rationale?
- *Teamwork:* did students work together effectively as a team?
- *Effort:* did students work together in a dedicated and co-operative manner and maximize the talents and skills of the individuals in the group?

• *Continued from page 10*

Draves and Coates claim something similar is happening today with computers: boys of almost any age are far more interested in the Internet, video games and technology than girls. They “like taking risks, being entrepreneurial, being collaborative – all the behaviours that lead to success in the workforce today.” But while they are rewarded for their behaviour in the workplace, they are punished in school for being non-conformist, poor listeners and restless.

It is a seductive theory. According to Jacquelynne Eccles, a psychologist at the University of Michigan who has done substantial research on gender and academic achievement,

## ***girls on the whole have always achieved higher grades than boys***

girls on the whole have always achieved higher grades than boys. “It’s always been true – this is not a new phenomenon,” she says.

Eccles believes that changing grades have more to do with new demographics than the intellectual capacity of the genders. Many socio-economic groups, particularly in the U.S., are defined by their low educational achievement. This is even more evident among the boys in these groups, who often lack the positive male encouragement necessary to perceive education as a valuable process. In addition, Eccles explains how the supposed “boys crisis” of today also existed in the 1960s, when it became clear that more boys were likely to fail classes and drop out of school.

Pollack’s research on American boys yielded the following results. Eighth-grade boys are 50 per cent more likely to be held back a grade than eighth-grade girls. By high school, 67 per cent of special-education students are boys. Boys receive 71 per cent of all school suspensions and are up to 10 times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with a serious emotional disorder (particularly Attention-Deficit Disorder). Boys are now twice as likely as girls to be considered “learning disabled” and boys are up to three times more likely than girls to be the victim of a violent crime and between four and six times more likely to commit suicide.

By the time boys reach high school, another problem appears: peer pressure to shun things academic. Pollack says the boys he interviewed consistently reported that it was not “cool” to be too smart in class or to work hard at academics. Dr. Alan King, professor emeritus with Queen’s University’s faculty of education, explains that the greater tendency of boys to withdraw and not participate is largely due to the allure of adolescent subcultures - such as skaters and punks - that offer teenage boys the legitimacy and acceptance that defies them in the classroom.

Yet, while dropout rates are on the rise, few boys leave unfinished and never return. A more common pattern shows boys to be “stubborn but low achieving,” King says. Starting in Grade 11, these boys start skipping class, then entire days and, later, full weeks. They often return to the classroom and make another go of it, only to disappear again. As a result, these boys typically lack the necessary credits to finish on time and are required to return for a fifth year.

The cycle does not stop at high school, either. According to King - who has done extensive research on secondary school drop-out rates - far more women are graduating and going on to college and university than men. In Ontario, this gap has grown even more pronounced since the elimination of Grade

13 in 2003. King says that girls are also doing better in almost every subject, while boys’ scores tend to be near the bottom and top of the spectrum. Girls usually do better on pure tests of ability while boys score higher when evaluation is non-standardized. However, King says boys’ faltering achievement







has “more to do with socialization than raw ability.” As he points out, girls typically have more developed career notions and their work habits tend to be passive and more responsive to traditional teaching styles.

Despite the low achievement of boys, King says it has been difficult to create awareness and “make a case for troubled boys.” But change is on the way. In a ground-breaking move, several school boards in Ontario now require that all of their schools develop written plans to help boys catch up with girls. Durham District School Board in Whitby, Ont., requires that all its schools develop more “male-centred” teaching methods to help boost boys’ literacy. These include inviting male authors to conduct readings and purchasing more reading material geared toward boys. Many other school boards have taken similar steps by recognizing that, in general, boys gravitate toward non-fiction, science fiction, horror or adventure stories, and girls toward general fiction. Ask boys if they read outside of school and they often assume reading applies only to fiction and say no. Clearly, schools need to redefine literacy for all students’ sake, says Barbara Bodkin, programs and services manager with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Another approach is to use different media forms to introduce literacy before boys begin to struggle, Bodkin says. For example, boys in Grade 2 and 3 often prefer drawing cartoons to tell a story. “We need to build on that and not dismiss it,” she says. “Many boys love violence, blood and gore, and we can’t discount that, either. Use of action is part of a writer’s craft.”

Several schools in Toronto, Hamilton and Peterborough (all in Ont.) are also experimenting with single-gender education

in Grades 7 and 8. Given the socio-economic factors at play within traditional single-gender environments (typically private schools), the value of this approach varies for both boys and girls and is difficult to track, Bodkin says. While she agrees that it is worth looking at, Bodkin is quick to point out that there is no quick fix. “If you change the structure but not the teaching, it’s not going to have an impact.”

The lack of positive male role models in schools has been a concern of parents and educators for many years now. A career in teaching continues to draw far more women than men, particularly in the primary and elementary grades. While many critics of the current school system highlight this absence as one of the chief problems with boys’ education, Bodkin feels that more male teachers would not change a systemic problem that may begin at home. Within the family setting, it is typically a female (mother, aunt, babysitter) who follows up with homework and reads with kids.

“It needs to start in the home,” she says. “It’s not just in school.” If a father is going shopping, he could ask his son to write up a list of items they need and budget how much money they will have to spend, Bodkin suggests. And, if this kind of positive male guidance cannot be simulated in the classroom, at least it can be nurtured there. Some schools have developed boys’ reading clubs, where older boys mentor younger students to foster reading as both enjoyable and an activity.

Fifteen years ago, it became clear that schools needed to address the ways in which girls learn. At the time, some critics said there could not be change. Now girls have caught up with – even surpassed – boys in the critical areas of math and science where for so long they lagged behind. However, while boys have become the current focus in the classroom, it should not detract from continued work with girls, Bodkin says. “We don’t want to create a supremacy for boys at the expense of girls.”

Continued research on how both genders learn is key to improving educational achievement across the board, Bodkin says. Even now, with girls’ grades on the rise, many female students display little confidence in their abilities. Recent EQAO tests (used to evaluate student performance in Ontario) asked elementary school boys whether they were good at math and sciences; the majority responded “yes.” When girls were asked the same question, most said “no.” In reality, the truth is the reverse.

“We want to make sure we maximize all students’ potential,” Bodkin says. “We don’t want boys to become more like girls. We want human beings to be multi-faceted.”

---

*Susan Murray is a freelance writer based in Toronto. She can be reached at [susan.murray@rogers.com](mailto:susan.murray@rogers.com)*



Educational Governance

# Are school boards obsolete?

By Sabrina Mehra

**W**here school boards are concerned, Canadians have not yet decided on a single model. Not that they haven't been trying. Every province has its own spin on what school governance should look like and even within provinces the school board governance model is prone to fluctuations. Such was the case in New Brunswick where, in 1996, the provincial government disbanded school boards altogether only to reinstate them in the form of district education councils after three years of debate. And that province isn't alone. Education stakeholders across the country continue to speculate where school boards fit in today's education landscape – or whether their presence is required at all.

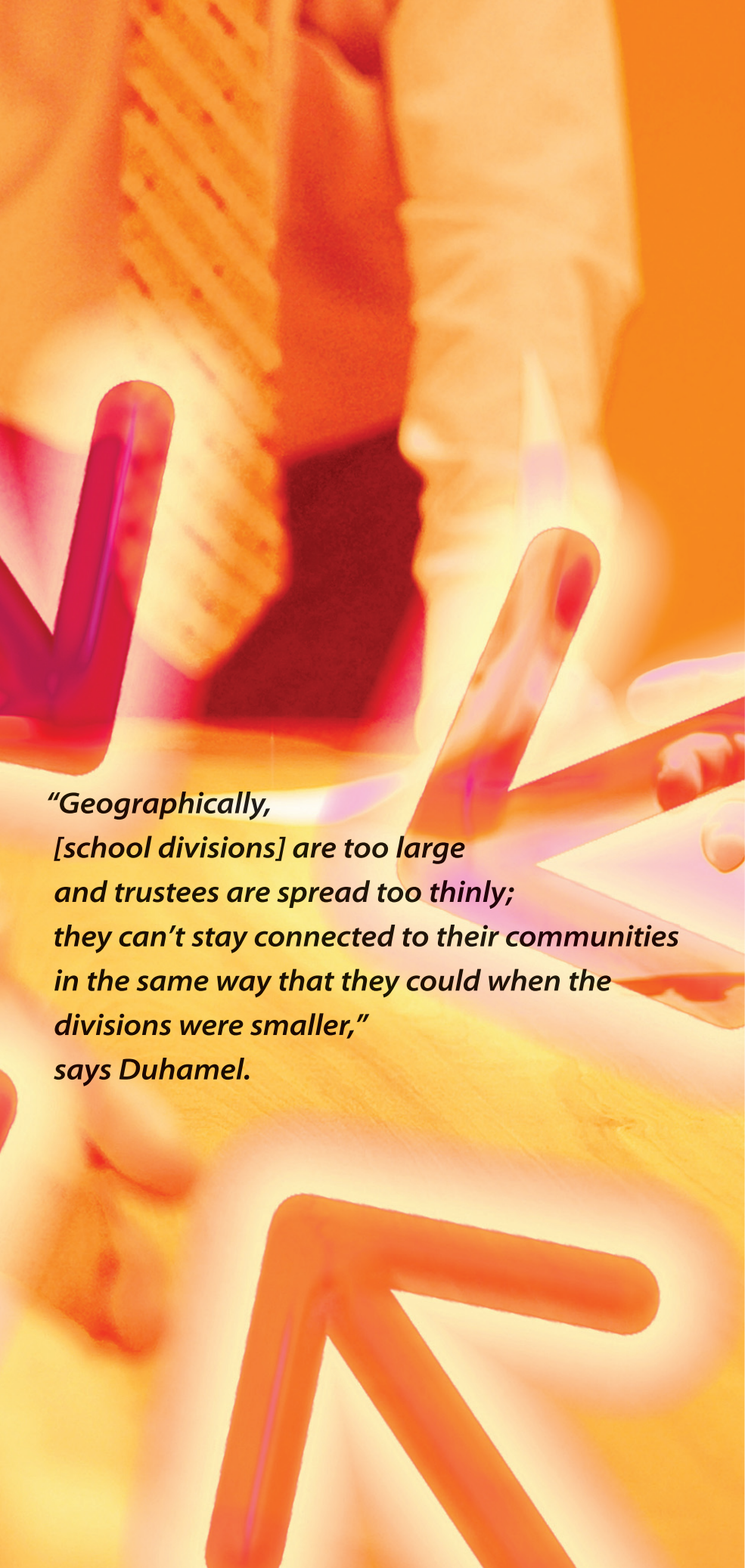
Traditionally, school boards in Canada have fulfilled the role of intermediary between a cluster of schools and their respective provincial governments. “[School boards] are essentially the body at the local level that translates provincial education policy into concrete programs and services for delivery to students in schools,” says Carolyn Duhamel, executive director of the Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST). “They try to bring community perspectives to bear on that, which shakes down into programs and services for kids and the allocation of resource dollars to support that.”

But while many stakeholders maintain that school boards are essential to the success of educational operations in any community, a growing number of political and societal factors are preventing many school boards from continuing in their traditional ways. “Trying to cling to the past is a serious challenge [for school boards] because so many of the things that they normally used to do... are often done now by ministries of education,” says Helen Raham, executive director of the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE), a Kelowna, B.C.-based education advocacy organization. One such removed responsibility is the ability to requisition funds from local property owners through taxes, says Michele Mulder, head of the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) and the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA). Mulder describes requisitioning power as a quintessential aspect of being an elected and accountable body, the removal of which has impacted how decisions are made. “I wouldn’t advocate that school boards would be able to tax at will, but there should be some sort of mechanism that school boards can use to raise a portion of the local tax base to do things that are meaningful and unique to their communities,” she says.

The inability to requisition taxes has resulted in a nationwide cash crunch at the school board level. “The reality is, in just about every school and school division in the country people want more services, more options and more programs than the dollars will provide,” says Duhamel. Public pressure is on school boards to meet the needs of all students without compromising other programs, explains Mulder. “There never seems to be enough money to do everything we want to help the children in our care today,” she says. In Nova Scotia, where board budgets are shrinking as enrollment declines, boards are expected to cover the cost of special education programs favoured by the general public. This is proving to be difficult, says Mary Jess MacDonald, executive director of the Nova Scotia School Boards







***“Geographically, [school divisions] are too large and trustees are spread too thinly; they can’t stay connected to their communities in the same way that they could when the divisions were smaller,” says Duhamel.***

Association (NSSBA). “[One challenge has been] being able to meet the need for programs and services in special education, because it’s a rising cost,” says MacDonald, who is also a member of the Strait District School Board (SDSB) in Port Hastings, N.S. “We’re very much committed in Nova Scotia to inclusive schooling for students, and it’s a rising cost.”

Consolidation of school divisions has seen boards becoming increasingly large and the community voice feared lost in the expansive machinery of mega-sized school boards. Many provincial governments are taking over responsibilities once considered within the domain of school boards, like collective bargaining with staff. With authority moving to ministries of education, the autonomy of boards and the communities they serve is at issue, says Terry Price, president of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation. “We’ve got a real change in where the autonomy rests,” she says. “I think that is probably what has precipitated some boards saying, ‘What are we good for if you’re not letting us do these things, because there are some things unique to this cluster of schools that we believe we should have more say in, and someone sitting in the capital area of that province may not fully understand the unique needs of this region.’” Price adds that amalgamation and centralizing authority might work well in urban centres, but none of the provinces are purely urban centres: “For example, I’m not convinced that the minister and his staff in Edmonton understand what the community is like in Northern Alberta – what it’s like to have one school in one community and the only other community is too far to transport your kids to on a daily basis.”

While governments are centralizing authority, communities are expecting significant personal attention from

their school boards, says Duhamel. “School divisions are getting caught in the squeeze between the general public on one hand and the governments on the other.” And the nature of the squeeze has changed over the time – the general public now expects school boards to respond to needs that traditionally fell to other agencies. “Communities and citizens are seeing schools as the answer to a lot of problems that are not necessarily linked to education,” says Mulder, citing health concerns, behaviour problems, poverty and hunger as examples of issues now largely considered the domain of public schools. “Kids will always go to school, so school is going to have to pick up the slack and really make an effort and, if you want to help students, you’re going to try and find programs or professionals who can help them get past these problems.” While Mulder has no problem with schools taking action to ensure that children in need are cared for, she feels an effort must be made to include other segments of society in the process: “You have to get partners working together and you have to get different levels of government agencies or government itself contributing financially and philosophically in order to make things work. There have been some really great strides made in areas across Canada where people are coming together... but it’s not everywhere.”

While school board elections are meant to reflect the “public” in “public education,” community apathy is at an all-time high. “The number of people who are interested in going to the polls and voting and making sure they know the issues is dwindling election after election – it’s a scary thing,” says Mulder. Duhamel explains that much of the voting public takes the stance that if they don’t have kids in the system they shouldn’t have to care about what goes on in schools and they shouldn’t have to pay for it: “Understandably, if you don’t have a sort of daily connection to the system, you’re probably going to be less attentive to what’s going on, less concerned and less interested. But what that often translates to in the public arena is a lot of criticism levelled at schools and school divisions that is not justified.”

A lot of people simply don’t understand what school boards generally do, says Raham, and fault lies with the school boards themselves: “I think perhaps school boards may not be doing the kind of job that they could be doing in explaining their role. I think [the public] sees school boards as always complaining about funding and, generally



Michelle Mulder



Helen Raham

***“Communities and citizens are seeing schools as the answer to a lot of problems that are not necessarily linked to education,” says Mulder.***

over the last 10 years, having to cut. And yet people also have the uneasy sense that maybe quality isn’t what we’d like it to be so it doesn’t engender a lot of confidence when they have concerns about quality and they wonder where the money is going.” For Raham, the more transparency in spending, the better, and if school boards are willing to acknowledge weak areas, rather than try to convey that everything is fine, she contends public confidence will grow. Communication between school boards and their public is poor, and the onus

is on the boards to educate and communicate with their communities, says Mulder. Being willing to explain the rationale behind spending decisions so people understand better will lead to a heightened public awareness of the role of the school board. “I think that can only strengthen what’s going

on at the governance table,” she says.

Dialogue is important in dispelling public apathy and carving a school governance model that works. The NSSBA fosters dialogue in the form of regular meetings between stakeholders and, in 2003, the association held focus groups and circulated a survey in order to collect suggestions from the public on what can and should be done to improve the education system in Nova Scotia. According to MacDonald, the public expects school boards to advocate for their share of the funding pie, foster consistent provincewide learning outcomes, advocate for and develop alternate education choices for “at risk” students and examine the “time on task” between teachers and students to ensure time spent in the classroom is well spent. The survey and focus groups, which involved more than 1,000 Nova Scotians, also revealed the public at least recognizes the school board as the one body



most involved in decision-making for their children. "I don't know that we would have thought that before we did the surveys and the focus groups, but that came out clearly," says MacDonald.

It's clear there are many challenges plaguing school governance, and many educational stakeholders are actively seeking solutions. Problem solving topped the agenda in January 2004 when educators, government officials, parents, students, school board representatives and other interested sectors congregated in Toronto to attend the Summit on Education Governance, a two-day symposium sponsored by The Learning Partnership, a Toronto-based nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening public education through stakeholder partnership. Mulder, who was a speaker at the event, says she was surprised by the sheer number of participants who expressed the same message regarding school governance. "[The message] was that school boards need to be elected – a good mix of [community-based] people who have an interest in education – and come to the table prepared to make decisions on behalf of all students within that single school division. It was remarkable because I expected to hear something different, like, 'What do school boards know anymore?'"

Well, what do school boards know anymore? How relevant are they? One tactic to adequately assess the relevance of school boards is to consider the reinstatement of school board-like bodies in New Brunswick a few years after they had been abolished, says Mulder. When the school board disappeared in New Brunswick virtually overnight, people really began to understand they'd lost their voice. "There was no one in their community that was accountable back to them to answer their questions," she says. "I think probably from a provincial perspective it was like, 'My gosh, this isn't going to work very well.'"

"I think one of the things we need to think about seriously in this country and in the area of public education, is that if we eliminate the school boards then there's nothing left between the user of the system, who is the parent or the student, and your provincial legislature," says Duhamel.

"I think more than ever we should be looking at strengthening the locally elected governance model that we have, because it really works well," adds Mulder. "I think people have just forgotten." 🐾

---

*Sabrina Mehra is a writer and columnist based in Vancouver, B.C. She can be contacted at [sabrina@sabrinamehra.com](mailto:sabrina@sabrinamehra.com)*

**INSURANCE INSTITUTE OF CANADA**

**INSURANCE EDUCATION INSTITUTE**

Register Today for an Exceptional Professional Development for Teachers of:

LAW • ECONOMICS • BUSINESS • SOCIAL STUDIES • FAMILY STUDIES • CAREER AND GUIDANCE EDUCATION

Teachers across Canada are invited to explore how insurance issues fit into their curriculum and how insurance careers may suit their students.

July 18 - 28, 2004  
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

To learn more, visit: [www.iic-iac.org/english/careers/teachers.html](http://www.iic-iac.org/english/careers/teachers.html)  
or call us at 519-884-0710 ext. 4106

**TUITION, ROOM, AND BOARD IS FREE.**

 Insurance Institute Canada

*"Not all  
educational software  
is created equal."  
LearningVillage.com  
will guide you  
to the best"*



*Learningvillage.com, is an online guide to the best in learning software from Canadian teachers, for Canadian teachers and families.*

Learning Village is an independent review and advisory centre for parents and teachers who are looking for credible information on the best in educational software. In Learning Village's Software Guide, you will find our short list on the best we have seen, with complete software profiles, who each program best suits, and commentary from teachers and children who have used the program. Online ordering links and ordering by phone are available on the site, through Learning Village's online partner, the CDROM Store, one of Canada's best educational software retailers.

[www.learningvillage.com](http://www.learningvillage.com)

## ADVERTISERS INDEX

Reader Response #	Advertiser	page#
1	Adobe	4
2	Canadian School Boards Association	6
3	Kumon Learning	OBC
4	Learning Village	23
5	Media Awareness Association	4
6	Wilfred Laurier University	23
7	Teachers Credit Union	Insert





# “MY TEACHER SAYS I'M REALLY GOOD AT LEARNING.”

It's not unusual for Kumon students to distinguish themselves in school. After all, Kumon is a different kind of after-school math and reading program.

Kumon's unique, practice-based method gives children a firm command of the fundamentals, which in turn makes it easier for you to introduce them to more complex concepts.

What's more, Kumon can help children of all ages and aptitudes build their study habits, learning skills, and confidence—all of which can help them succeed not only in the classroom, but far beyond.

To learn more about Kumon, please call or visit us online today.

*Kumon success stories are everywhere. If you have one you'd like to share, please contact Kumon Canada at 800.ABC.MATH or [inquiriescanada@kumon.com](mailto:inquiriescanada@kumon.com).*



**Let your child amaze you.<sup>®</sup>**  
**800.ABC.MATH [www.kumon.com](http://www.kumon.com)**