



## On the (criminal) record by Keith Harford, Prince Edward Learning Centre



One day, I learned by accident how many of my students had criminal records. I had arranged a debate on the topic of prison. Throughout the discussion, all of the students reflected on personal experiences in jail. I was shocked. It changed my perspective on the needs of our students. Until then, I had cheerily prepared them for the boundless opportunities of the labour market. I felt so naïve. Obviously, I needed a Plan B in order to be more relevant to the students' needs.

First, I wondered why I was so late in noticing how widespread this problem was. Why was I so ill prepared? Perhaps it was the employment focus of the MTCU and Ontario Works. Or maybe it was me. I came to literacy from an employment preparation back-

ground. Either way, my focus had been on students' future without being properly informed about their past. I wasn't taking a holistic approach.

To be honest, I'm still not taking a holistic approach. I only know about criminal records if students chose to volunteer this information. I don't have any statistics on the correlation between illiteracy and criminal records. I have not been trained to deal with this pervasive barrier. I rarely hear people talking about this problem at workshops or conferences. I have seen next to no information on how to provide job search assistance to people with criminal records.

There doesn't appear to be a Plan B. I feel like I have been left in the dark.

The literacy field needs to shine some light on this vital issue. We cannot talk about employment without addressing this serious barrier to employability. In the rush to

train students for the future, we often overlook a major difficulty in their past.

Consequently the hopes that we have for these students are often hopelessly unrealistic.

To be relevant, we need to meet students where they are now. Perhaps we can help students with criminal records secure a pardon, reintegrate with society, or catch up on the learning that they missed while in prison. These are all noble goals. There is no reason to hide these relevant, empowering and socially engaging outcomes in the dark.

I feel that MTCU should embrace these outcomes. Furthermore, literacy practitioners should receive more training on how to help students who are facing the barrier of a criminal record.

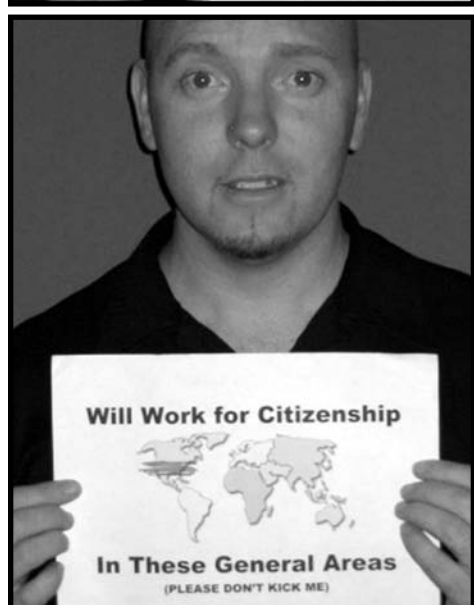
It is time to put a Plan B into action. ☞



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## Using literacy to make new friends ...



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

## Where was the 'community' at the CLO conference?

by Nadine Sookermany

### Community:

\*A group of people having common interests: *the scientific community; the international business community.*

\*A group viewed as forming a distinct segment of society: *the gay community; the community of color.*

Similarity or identity: *a community of interests.*

\*Sharing, participation, and fellowship.

*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company*



I attended Community Literacy of Ontario's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual AGM and Conference this past October for the first time. It was an interesting, eye opening experience for me as the only woman of colour at the conference. As a literacy worker from Toronto, I learned about the different ways we do literacy work across Ontario but the conference did not represent the literacy work that we do in our program. It didn't examine the complicated lives our learners lead from a social justice perspective. It didn't consider the realities of the challenges and barriers they face everyday. Comments were made that belittled their experiences, and mine. Where were their voices? Where were the voices of the economically and racially oppressed? Where were the voices of those who are striving to learn, not just to get a job, but for other reasons like gaining independence and playing a bigger role in their communities?

The voices that stood out shared how literacy pro-

grams teach learners to 'change their attitudes, values and beliefs.' Another shared a story about a female learner who left her literacy program to raise her son and returned once her son entered school. This worker said that she believed if the learner had stayed in the program while raising her son over the last 4 years she would have been a better parent and spared her son future problems in school and possibly a life of poverty. In another workshop, literacy workers were asked to brainstorm about what annoys us about our learners. Is this our role as literacy workers, to impart our middle class values and beliefs in order to 'make our learners better people?' What does this imply? I am afraid we are treading on dangerous ground when we suggest that this is the role of education and literacy. If we don't consider the interests of our learners, and include them in our community of learning without making assumptions about where they are coming from and who they are, we are not doing the work. Literacy is about community. Community can hold diversity and honour our need as humans to be accepted and affirmed in our identities, even when there is a difference. A community can share common interests yet provide a space for those who don't quite fit. The word community appears in CLO so I believe we need to ensure that all members of our community are honoured and included. ☞



# No more resolutions

by Tracy Westell

I.

Anne Moore, from Action Read in Guelph, conducted a discussion about goal setting at a recent event put on by the Festival of Literacies at OISE. She is working on updating Action Read's popular goal-setting workbook, *A Dream that Walks*. She discussed some of the tensions about using goals as a way of charting a learning path. As it turned out many people in the room (all literacy workers) were not all that comfortable with using goals in their own lives. Many of us found we didn't meet our stated goals and have resorted to a more organic and dynamic way of learning for ourselves. It's easy to chart a linear path that takes us towards a goal but it is much harder to predict the many complications that will arise to lead us off that path. For people marginalized by poverty, poor health, racism and other oppressions, the path is even rougher. Anne's session at OISE left me wondering why we ask learners to do what we have figured out is nearly impossible to do.

II.

I've been reading a lot about complexity theory, especially as it relates to learning and policy development. Briefly, complexity theory comes out of chaos theory, quantum physics and dissipative structure theory (in other words, it comes from scientists studying natural and man-made systems). Complexity theory is concerned with complex adaptive systems, systems whose behaviour is patterned and unpredictable. Complexity theory guru Ralph Stacey says: "A complex adaptive system consists of a large number of agents, each of which behaves according to its own principles of local interaction. No individual agent, or group of agents, determines the patterns of behaviour that the system as a whole displays, or how these patterns evolve, and neither does anything outside the system." The stock market is a complex system, our brain is, and so are ecosystems, communities and classrooms. "Complexity deals with the nature of emergence, innovation, learning and adaptation." (see the Santa Fe Institute at <http://www.santafe.edu/>).

Policy frameworks try to engineer particular outcomes and develop certain system behaviours. (\*Tosey 2002). Complexity theory says that we will have marginal success at predicting behaviours and outcomes in complex systems. Complexity theorists suggest that policy makers and others working to meet certain outcomes (goals), work instead on developing guidelines and principles - simple rules for local situations. Complex systems are the most innovative and productive when they are allowed to live at the edge of chaos. Trying to control and monitor complex systems will in fact paralyze them.

III.

Over the holidays I read an article by Harvey Goldstein "Education for all: the globalization of learning targets" ([www.mlwin.com/hgpersonal/education%20for%20all.pdf](http://www.mlwin.com/hgpersonal/education%20for%20all.pdf)). He says that many international, national and regional organizations have set literacy targets that have not been, and may never be met. If you've been working in literacy for any time at all, this will not be a surprise to you. This is a hugely complex issue that is not only influenced by education and development policies. Education systems interact with many other complex systems which educators have no control over (complexity theorists would argue no single agent or group of agents has control over a complex system).

Back to Goldstein: he argues that test protocols may be invalid (he uses IALS as an example), that "teaching to the test" (an unforeseen outcome of outcomes based education) diminishes overall learning, and that setting educational targets may centralize power and control in inappropriate development bodies (such as the World Bank). He ends by suggesting new policies should emphasize "local context and culture, within which those with local knowledge can construct their own aims rather than rely upon common yardsticks implemented from a global perspective."

IV.

Having aspirations, intentions, hopes and dreams is part of being human and part of what moves us to learn. But to tie us to goals, outcomes, targets etc. developed by centralized bodies that do not live with local realities seems counterproductive. And for us as individuals to succumb to that ever-present voice in our heads telling us to set goals and punishing us when we don't meet those goals seems counterproductive. It would be good to explore with other literacy workers what kind of policies and practices might work better to reflect the complex, dynamic and organic nature of learning.

# DUNDAS WEST



Reading a book, she says. Good. Takes your mind off your troubles. I'm wedged beside this woman, large in her long-sleeved sweater, corduroy pants.

Humid mid-summer day. She would tell me more, but I'm under the protection of poems. (No need to read the ads.) Where is she headed? I look up

near my stop. Her words send me off: *Books keep you busy, keep your mind going.*

by Sheila Stewart

## TORONTO SUBWAY

PLEASE  
HOLD  
HANDRAIL

### Outcome bound ?



Do you feel bilious, ill-humoured, choleric, caustic, irregular or dyspeptic? Many empirical studies have been conducted to show that over-dependence on outcomes can cause these symptoms. Our R and D department has created a cure for this common complaint. Guaranteed to work in 4 weeks or your money back!

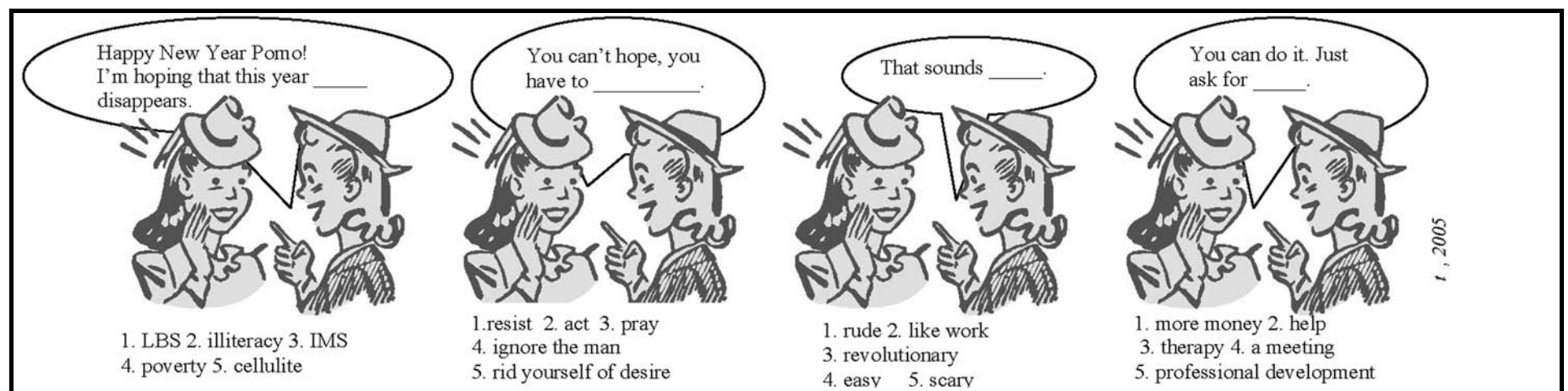
Certified to work by Dr. Truss Yursef, A.B.C., MRI, IMS, ETC.

**Personal Testimony:** "I tried Dr. Yursef's medicine and after only 3 weeks I am freed of dependence on outcomes. The hardest part was getting over how comfortable I'd become with only one way of seeing and doing things. Outcomes are still part of my life but they no longer run my life!" *Di Vursways, Literacy Practitioner*

For more information and support: talk to your colleagues and read *The Literacy Enquirer*

\*Tosey, Paul. Complexity Theory: A Perspective on Education, 30 July 2002, University of Surrey, retrieved January 2005 from [www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full\\_record&section=generic&id=53](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full_record&section=generic&id=53)

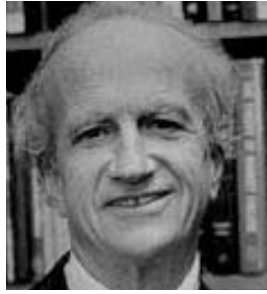
"Complexity refers to the condition of the universe which is integrated and yet too rich and varied for us to understand in simple common mechanistic or linear ways. Complexity deals with the nature of emergence, innovation, learning and adaptation."



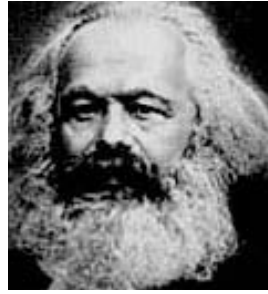
**Name that Capital** composed by Tracey Mollins with files from www.wikipedia.com



**Pierre-Félix Bourdieu**  
France (1930-2002)



**Gary Stanley Becker**  
USA (1930- )



**Karl Marx**  
Prussia (1818-1883)



**Robert Putnam**  
USA (1940- )

**Pierre-Félix Bourdieu**, a French sociologist and social-justice activist, extended the idea of capital to categories such as **social** and **cultural capital** and explored how these can be acquired, exchanged and converted. **Cultural capital** is the non-economic forces such as family background, social class, education, etc., that influence academic success. He showed that accent, grammar, spelling and style—all part of **cultural capital**—are major factors in **social mobility** (getting a higher paid, higher status job).

In 1992, **Gary Stanley Becker** won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for “having extended the domain of micro-economic analysis to a wide range of human behavior and interaction, including non-market behavior.” He says that **human capital** is similar to means of production such as factories and machines—one can invest in **human capital** (via education, training, medical treatment) and one’s income depends partly on the rate of return on the **human capital** one owns. **Human capital** is different from other means of produc-

tion because, unlike the other factors of production, knowledge is:

- \*Expandable and self generating with use: as a worker gets more experience and her knowledge base increases, so does her **human capital**. The economics of scarcity is replaced by the economics of self-generation.
- \*Transportable and shareable: knowledge is easily moved and shared and the original holder can still use the knowledge even after it is transferred.

**Human capital** is the assets we own. It allows us to receive income or “interest earned.”

In some ways, **human capital** is similar to what **Karl Marx** called **labour-power**: under capitalism, workers sell **labour-power**. Marx pointed to “two disagreeably frustrating facts” with theories that equate wages with interest on human capital.

1. The worker must actually work, exert his or her mind and body, to earn this “interest.” Marx distinguished between one’s **labour-power** (capacity to work) and one’s **practice** (activity of working).
2. A free worker cannot sell **human capital** to receive

money; it is not a liquid asset. Even a slave, whose **human capital** can be sold, does not earn an income him-or herself. Under capitalism, to earn income, a worker must submit to the authority of an employer. As the employer wants profit, workers must produce **surplus-value**—work beyond what is necessary to maintain their **labour-power**.

**Social capital** “refers to the collective value of all ‘social networks’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other,” according to **Robert Putnam**. He says that **social capital** is the key to building and maintaining democracy and has benefits for societies, governments, individuals and communities.

**Social capital** may not always be beneficial. Horizontal networks of individual citizens and groups that enhance community productivity and cohesion are said to be **positive social capital** assets. Self-serving exclusive gangs and hierarchical patronage systems that operate at cross purposes to community interests can be thought of as **negative social capital** burdens on society. ❧

**Some timely, hockey-related observations:**

On December 13, the sports panel on Studio 2 (TVO) discussed the NHL contract negotiations. Stephen Brunt of the *Globe and Mail* pointed out that hockey players are different from workers in other industries; as they provide the employer with both labour-power and the product, they are not as easily replaceable as say, auto workers and this gives them more power as they negotiate the worth of their human capital.

Mary Ormsby of the *Toronto Star* replied that this power is mitigated by the fact that hockey players have a limited choice of employers and if they seek wealth and celebrity, the NHL is their only choice.

**Which led to these questions:**

Are auto workers really more easily replaced than hockey players?

Which workers provide employers with both labour-power and a product?

Do not teachers and adult educators belong to this category?

Does not each educator introduce each student to a unique experience that cannot be easily replicated?

And if we provide both labour-power and the product, and have a choice of employers, why do we earn so much less than auto workers, let alone hockey players?

**And ...What does it matter how much human capital you have if they send your job overseas?**

Here is an excerpt of a letter from Tracey Mollins to the NDP, PSAC, her local Liberal MP and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in response to a CBC news report. The report was about the knowledge economy and how in the future there will be no unskilled jobs in countries such as Canada because they will all be outsourced to countries such as India. Only the CCPA replied—they are going to follow up on this for the Alternative Budget.

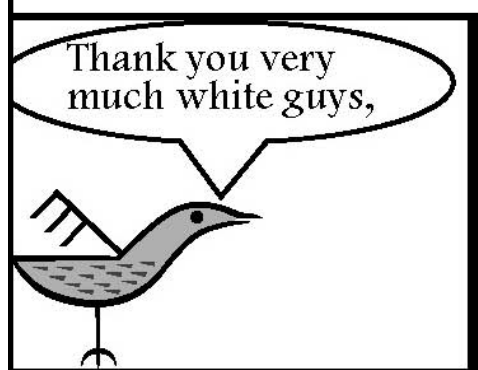
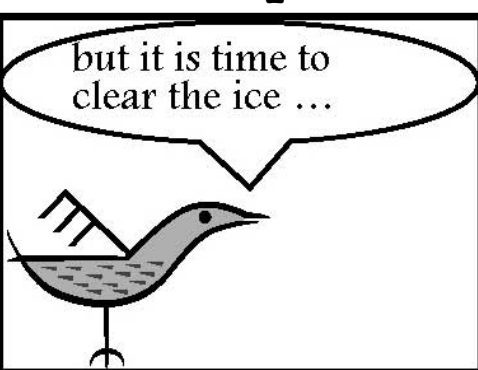




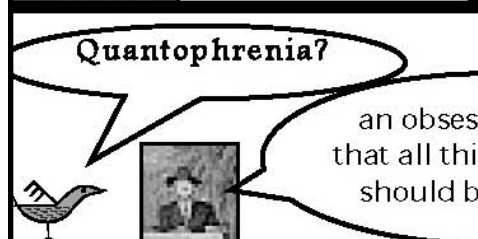
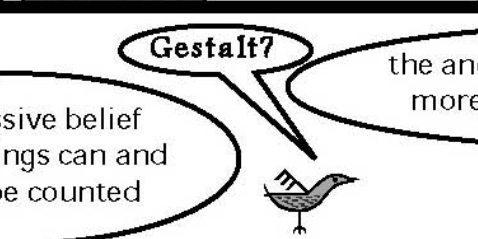
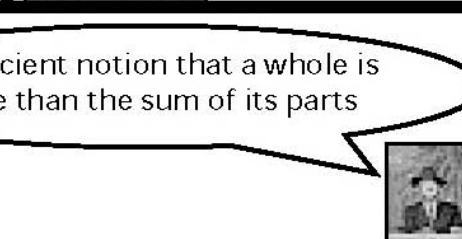
...Statistics Canada is outsourcing an \$85 million contract for work on the 2006 census. Are there really no “unskilled” workers left in Canada or is this a way to avoid paying union wages and providing benefits to organized workers? How can we expect private sector employers to act as “good corporate citizens” and respect worker rights if the federal government doesn’t?

...This strategy is being used by the same department that is scheduled to produce the IALSS (International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey) report later this spring. If past experience predicts future events, the report will be accompanied by headlines expressing shock at the low levels of literacy possessed by Canadian workers and blaming their lack of skills for their individual and our collective inability to compete in the global marketplace.

...Is the relationship between being “unskilled” and unemployed cause and effect as the headlines will have us believe, or a result of the fact that both the private and public sector value certain workers and their families so little that outsourcing their jobs to the lowest bidder has become common practice?

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives  
[www.policyalternatives.ca/](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/)

**Adventures of the Social Capital Zamboni** by Tracey Mollins

 <p>Thank you very much white guys,</p>	 <p>but it is time to clear the ice ...</p>	 <p>call in the social capital zamboni!</p>
 <p>Literacy workers unite! Defeat the audit culture!</p>	 <p>Conquer quantophrenia!</p>	 <p>Restore the gestalt of the human experience!</p>
 <p>Quantophrenia?</p>	 <p>Gestalt?</p>	 <p>the ancient notion that a whole is more than the sum of its parts</p>

an obsessive belief that all things can and should be counted

## Accountability Perspectives by Katrina Grieve



Over the last several months I have been following an online discussion in the United States regarding literacy policy. I have been struck by the similarities in discussions about accountability, and the pressures that result when government funders attempt to measure the impact of the money they spend in adult literacy programs. In the US, things are taken a step further in that there has been increasing pressure to use standardized tests to measure literacy gains. What is obvious from these discussions is that there is a huge gap in how learners, practitioners, administrators, and government decision-makers think about these issues and in the language they use.

While many practitioners are reluctant to use standardized systems of levels to report “progress”, there is a wide range of perspectives about the need to use such systems to show accountability. I am going to quote from some of

the debate from the AAACE-NLA discussion to give you a taste of these different perspectives.

— “Assessment systems have greatly improved, with more consistent and widespread use of standardized, psychometrically sound assessments and abandonment of subjective assessment or teacher judgments that do not accurately measure student learning... Programs have replaced measures such as self-esteem and student appreciation of the classes with objective measures of student literacy gains.” (Department of Education: annual report on adult education to Congress). ie – standardized tests are objective while learners’ and teachers’ judgments of progress are not valid.

— “The data collected through the National Reporting System (NRS) is almost completely useless. It is based on totally arbitrary ‘benchmarks’ that have been set a different levels, using different methods, with different indicators at the state and federal levels.” (Thomas Sticht)

— “I buy the taxpayer argument. I am a taxpayer too, and I want to know that my money is actually helping students make adult literacy gains. The crux of the problem is how literacy gains are to be measured. Do higher levels translate into jobs? More income? Better housing? Health care? ... As a taxpayer I want to know that my

money makes a measurable difference in increasing adult literacy.”

— “We need to stop looking at the people with literacy problems as facts and figures and look at them for what they are—real people.” (Archie Willard, learner)

— “I feel that ‘hard scientific evidence’ is really an illusion. Adult literacy needs discovery which may come at different speeds to most people, but it does happen. Can this be tested? I don’t know. Discovery is the fun and amazement of learning. Hard science, illusive.” (practitioner)

— “Programs like ours had their voices and their learners’ voices stripped from them because they would not agree to the NRS, nor timed testing of adults with low reading skills. We became non-members of the Adult Education & Literacy System (losing funding) and are far better for it.” (practitioner)

— “Even when there is some direct measurable outcome, it is often problematic to attribute it to the literacy factor. More typically, it is one of a variety of variables interacting as adults engage literacy programs as part of a developmental process of change wherein socio-emotional factors may well be as important as progress gained in reading...When the concept of accountability (itself a metaphor) gets linked to another

metaphor (return on investment), then we have a very restricted environment that allows for the allocation of funds and a very restricted construction of reality.” (George Demetron)

— So how do we measure success in learning? “One way of doing it is to expose people to different kinds of environments and try to document the extent to which they can participate in those contexts. Another way is by collecting anecdotal evidence. I as a taxpayer would be happier if a teacher reported that she believes her students can better use the health care system, than if she reports on her students’ increase in level on a particular assessment.”

Similar discussions on accountability can be heard across Ontario programs. In the US, many small community-based programs have dropped out of the official Adult Education System because they were unable or unwilling to meet the accountability expectations of government funders, which placed a huge burden on their programs without accurately reflecting the kind of learning that was taking place. And so I pose the question: “Could the same thing happen here?” ❧

You can find the discussion at: <http://lists.literacytent.org/mailman/listinfo/aaace-nla>

## Reflections of a practitioner by Susan Lefebvre



I have just finished reading an article titled *Education for the Soul* by Jack Miller (1996), an educator at OISE. He claims that the twentieth century has not been good for the soul and that a mechanized approach to living has contributed to the loss of soul. The article resonated with me, as he described a society that values a “continuous improvement, performance-based” approach to life and an educational system that is concerned, it seems, with only “efficiency and effectiveness” and outcomes. LBS reform policy is laden with language that reflects disrespect for the human spirit/soul. Is trying to survive in a system where my success (not to mention learners’ suc-

cess) is measured against well-defined rigid indicators partly responsible for my struggle to characterize spirit?

Robert Sardello (1992) contends that education:

*... has become an institution whose purpose in the modern world is not to make culture, not to serve the living cosmos, but to harness humankind to the dead forces of materialism. Education as we know it, from preschool through graduate school, damages the soul.* (p. 50)

My musings may give the impression that I am pessimistic, but for the most part when I focus on the learners and not on policy demands, I am most hopeful. I see many moments of spontaneous insights and unexpected learnings that are more valuable than any Level indicators. I witness a vitality and excitement in learners which inspires, motivates and feeds their souls.

I like what Miller had to say about soul: *As a source of energy we can sometimes feel the soul*

*expand. A beautiful piece of music can make our souls feel expansive; likewise, in a threatening or fearful situation, we can feel our souls contract or shrink. A soulful curriculum would provide a nourishing environment for the soul’s expansion and animation.*

Miller also suggests we, as teachers, should bring our souls to the classroom. Two qualities that the soulful teacher can bring to the classroom are presence and caring. Presence arises from mindfulness where the teacher is capable of listening deeply. Caring can encourage the development of community in the classroom. I have observed and been part of this sense of community in groups at Literacy for East Toronto. I believe this community helps to keep learners “present” and to make the all important connections and meanings necessary to the belief in the possibility of goals. ❧

Miller, J.P. *Education for the Soul* Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto Paper presented at AME, November 15, 1996

### THE LITERACY ENQUIRER

❧ January 2005 ❧

The Literacy Enquirer is published by the *policy learning circle*. The *policy learning circle* meets informally from time to time in a variety of venues to discuss how practitioners can have input into policy decisions and how to bring our knowledge to the policy-making process.

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Any short (500 words or less) articles that question or challenge dominant ways of thinking about adult literacy will be accepted.

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