

The Literacy Update ~ No. 2

The Newsletter of PEI Volunteers for Literacy. Fall 2006. PO Box 20151 Charlottetown PE C1A 9E3

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Who are we? What do we do?

PEI Volunteers for Literacy have been volunteering in elementary schools for over 13 years as Project L.O.V.E.; and as BOAST volunteers in intermediate and high schools for about five years.

In 35 schools across PEI, more than 250 very committed (mainly retired) older volunteers help students with their school work in various areas. In the elementary program, help is usually in that most important area, reading.

PEI Volunteers for Literacy go to their school at least once a week, spending between an hour and a whole morning or afternoon in the school. We usually help one student at a time, listening and coaching them with words, reading aloud to model good pronunciation and expression for them, helping with classroom projects or catching up on missed assignments.

Teachers whose students work with the volunteers all agree: Their students benefit greatly from this help, gaining self-confidence through the interest shown in them by our volunteers.

Workshops Planned for Volunteers

Did you ever wonder just how reading is being taught to our youngest readers these days? Does it seem to you that they don't teach children phonics - or heavens, even the alphabet! - the way they used to?

Last Spring a number of teachers presented workshops on how reading is taught now, and how volunteers and parents can help with the process.

Along the way they were able to dispel some of the myths about phonics and the alphabet, and they showed a number of other great strategies which children must learn to become the good readers that our increasingly literate world needs.

By popular demand, these workshops are being repeated this fall. Do try to attend - the presenters do a great job of making the material easy to understand. Along the way you'll probably hear some wonderful stories from them about the good work that you and your fellow volunteers do to help them in their jobs!

Please call our office to register, and invite anyone you

think might be interested, including parents of kindergarten or Grade One students you know- they are very welcome too.

Alberton Elementary School
October 3, 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Athena Consolidated School,
Summerside October 5, 1:00
- 2:30 pm.

West Kent Elementary
School, **Charlottetown**
October 12, 1:00 - 2:30 pm.

Please call to register for the workshop of your choice, either the Charlottetown number (368-4695) or the toll-free number (1-866-741-5683).

Remember, volunteers are eligible for mileage reimbursement!



And the Name is...

The new name of our organization was ratified at the annual meeting in June. The discussion was passionate because you are passionate about helping children and giving them love - along with help with reading.

That shouldn't change, no matter what we call ourselves, and don't worry about using Project L.O.V.E. as the name - for years to come! We expect that, we're having a hard time getting used to the new name ourselves.

For the information of those who weren't at the meeting, there were a number of reasons for the name change listed by our Chair as a preamble to the discussion.

There may be a feeling that we are just being told what to do by the UPEI researchers, but there's a whole lot more involved.

A number of years ago, the Board discussed copyrighting the name with a copyright lawyer. We learned that the name **Project Love** is already copyrighted by CODE (the Canadian Organization for Development through Education) for their Valentine's Day project of collecting school supplies for students in developing countries. Check their website: www.codecan.org for more information on this.

Even though our name

was spelled with all capitals and periods the lawyer explained that it was not different enough to copyright.

We should have changed the name at that time, because if CODE had wanted to, they could have charged us with copyright infringement.

We have had questions about the name connected to child sexual abuse. Male volunteers report getting "funny looks" from the RCMP when they apply for their criminal records checks. We've also received a few creepy emails from those who find our website on the internet.

The fact that we had to develop a new name for the intermediate and senior high school program ("BOAST"-Bringing Older Adults and Students Together) was a sign that the Project L.O.V.E. name was inappropriate for some of our students. Older students, particularly boys, weren't keen to have anything to do with a program which sounds "sissy" to them.

Regarding the choice of **PEI Volunteers for Literacy** as a name, on the positive side it is self-explanatory in that we don't have to explain any acronyms (LOVE, BOAST).

Also, the Board chose deliberately to call us Volunteers (rather than Seniors) for Literacy because some of our volunteers aren't seniors, and because we included the students who *volunteer* to come out and participate in our program in the name.

Members at the meeting who spoke on behalf of keeping Project L.O.V.E. felt keenly that we will lose 13 years of good will and high profile under the name, and this is true.

In further discussion volunteers noted that school staff and volunteers are very happy with the name Project LOVE, and they like the warmth and cosiness associated with the name.

Others agreed that we are not a short-term project, but wished to retain the LOVE portion of the name - perhaps as the LOVE Program or something like this.

Another volunteer suggested that it is a shame to change such a nice name but it is being done for the right reasons - to attract more boys, and older students, and perhaps better funding as well. A volunteer noted that her local junior high school is reluctant to participate because of the cute image, but hopes that the new name will be more acceptable to older students and the school's administrators.

All in all, it's been an interesting discussion that makes us think about what we do - and that is good for the organization. And there's no doubt that, even with the new name, in the words of Emeritus Board Member and former Chair Bernice Bell, "they could LOVE as older

persons and as grandparents are well experienced in doing. LOVE was their skill on their resume, metaphorically speaking.”

Love is still the first skill that our volunteers need - love of helping children, love of reading. We're not going to leave that behind.

Libraries - can they use our help?

When we think of literacy we naturally think of libraries. They're full of great, up-to-date books which are available free to all. They also have many other things - DVD's, videos, magazines, computers for public use, talking books, large print books - and staff who can help you find things - and even bring them in to your local library if they're not on the shelves already.

Yet it's worrying that libraries are not being used as much as before. Librarians report that children's books, both fiction and non-fiction, are not circulating as much.

Home computers are taking the place of the community library (for those who have a computer and internet access at home) for research. Children aren't being taken to visit their local library with their school classes, as they once were.

How can we help? We have a few ideas, but you probably

have many more. We want to support our community libraries, and keep them very busy! It's all going to help with our literacy rates.

Community libraries are being made available for literacy activities like Laubach or ESL tutoring. Literacy and ESL collections are being increased. If you know of someone who has been looking for a good tutoring space, tell them to give the local library a call.

Use the library yourself! Borrow and bring to school books which you know your students will enjoy - things which aren't available in their school library. Tell them how to get a library card, and the hours of your local library. Let them know about special events at their library, like Story Time or author visits. Perhaps you could volunteer to do Story Time yourself!

The provincial library has provided us with a number of “**key cards**” which can be used at any library. If any of your students are interested in having their own library card, you can give him or her a key card and tell them to take it in to the local library. They must have one of their parents with them to activate the card.

The library also had a number of booklets, stickers and posters left from their summer reading program, and they're giving them to us. I'll have them with me when I visit schools, so ask for them for your students.

Dial a Story - or Bus Stories!

In related news, Barbara Kissick, the Children's Librarian for the provincial library service, is very excited about two new initiatives she has been able to develop.

Telephone Stories are bedtime stories available 24 hours a day. Available in English or French, these short (3-5 minutes) stories are available in preschool and older ages. Call toll-free 1-888-280-7070 and choose English or French, preschool or older, and hear a story over the phone!

Barbara says there's new story every week, so you can call back again and again. Aliant is providing the toll-free service for the Story Line.

One Friday every month, for lucky transit bus-riders in Charlottetown, Barbara is telling Stories on the Bus! No more boredom on the bus waiting for your stop - though you might miss it if you want to hear the end of the story!

The schedule for the Fall is Rt. 4, October 13; Rt. 2, November 10; and Rt. 3, December 15.

She's also reading at Sobey's Community Room in Charlottetown on Saturday mornings beginning on October 14.

Further to Books for Boys...

Literacy at Work, the quarterly publication of ABC Canada, has an article in its most recent issue (No. 48) called "Boys and Reading: New approaches stretch definitions of literacy".

The article talks about recent research into the facts about boys and reading - facts which are probably no surprise to you:

- * Boys score lower on standardized tests than girls,
- * Boys are less likely than girls to go to university,
- * Boys are 2 to 5 times more likely to have a reading disability. *They also have greater difficulty overcoming it.*

One bit of good news - results from a recent study show that the time boys spend playing video games isn't entirely wasted! The researchers said that boys are developing unique skills, learning multi-tasking and non-linear thinking skills.

However, compared to girls, boys are not doing well in reading tests. There are plenty of reasons, but in many ways it boils down to one - **boys don't see reading as a way to be male.**

They're encouraged to model the behaviour of sports figures. Sports are important, reading or schoolwork isn't. Reading

programs like the Toronto Raptors' *Reading to Achieve* are countering this belief by having Raptors basketball players visit local schools for reading aloud.

And there are other examples. Male mentors (like our volunteer readers) make a big difference with boys because they finally see men reading and enjoying it. This counters the belief that reading is for girls, which is their belief when their elementary teachers are usually women, and Mom (rather than Dad) is the bed-time story reader.

Besides male role models, we can provide reading materials which boys are willing to read. They aren't keen on fiction, or "storybooks". But they **are** keen on non-fiction, how-to manuals, magazines, "graphic novels (comic books) and computer games. They like that the information comes to them in short, concrete bursts.

The bottom line for us is to find out what our boy students are interested in, particularly the older ones, and then find books or magazines or other materials on these topics and bring them in. Remember those magazines at the library too - don't feel you have to buy things. Borrowing is fine.

Issue No. 48 wasn't yet up on the web-site of ABC Canada but it should be soon, if you want to read the entire article. Check www.abc-canada.org and look under "our publications".

Awards at the Annual General Meeting

Once again this year we were able to honour a number of volunteers who have made an immense commitment to volunteering in our Island schools.

Elizabeth Nimmo, Bill Callahan, and Parkside principal Lorna Champion have all been involved in our program for ten years. Thank you one and all!



Vernon River School volunteer Bill Callahan receives his ten-year plaque from Hon. Mildred Dover.

Happy New Year!

This time of year always feels more like a new beginning - especially so for those little ones just starting out their school career!

Welcome back, all of those who are returning, and we hope you have a wonderful and productive year at school.