

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 1

- Co-President John Myers' Message
- Buzz Around the Bee

Page 2

- Bev's Findings
- Chapter Executives

Page 3

- Bev's Findings (cont.)

Page 4

- An Elementary Teacher's Experience
- Spelling Bee Gone Viral



**Buzz Around
The Bee**

View highlights of the
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John Myers

Co-President's Message

Implications for the Classroom

The Readathon books I reviewed in this and the past newsletter were deliberately linked to a theme of how we struggle with thinking through the complexities of reality in the world as we explore all parts of the elementary and secondary curriculum. The current world of Covid-19 and the turmoil of the election in the United States made these readings more relevant to me in the areas of science, history, politics, and math.

So, what are some implications for teaching and learning for us to consider?

Beliefs come to us through culture, communities, experiences, and sometimes through serious thinking, though less than we might imagine. Beliefs may or may not conform to norms of truth, goodness, or beauty. Once a belief forms it is hard to change. If you recognize an incongruity of a novel experience linked to an emotion, you might change your mind about something or someone. Change rarely happens through blaming or shaming.

Our rational side, as described in "slow" or "system 2 thinking", is hard to use in the day-to-day world. "Fast" or "system 1 thinking" is our daily default and has served us well over the million or so years of our evolution as we continued to make sense of the information we were exposed to while foraging or farming. In our times, information may represent a "swamp": full of partial truths, misinformation, and deliberate lies. How can we navigate through these?

Developing a vocabulary as Levitin and Macdonald suggest, can provide us with a rough map through the swamp. Rosling offers some markers or "instincts" to think about when we switch into slow thinking. These are often complemented with some of the curriculum programs and projects in the files and in the educational marketplace such as the Critical Thinking Consortium, Facing History and Ourselves, Voices into Action, and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

Let me conclude this first step into the swamp by recounting two classroom vignettes that illustrated moves into slower and more thoughtful thinking. While we are aware of "mind on" tasks, these stories broadened my horizons and those of the students I observed.

A teacher candidate (now teaching in Alberta) began and concluded her 70-minute English Language Arts lessons with a brief mindfulness exercise such as having students sit in a circle and take a few deep breaths. These tasks took about one minute, and I asked some of the male students what they thought of it. "She helped me to get focused so I was ready to learn." was the response for everyone I interviewed.

Another teacher who was a Governor-General Award winner in teaching, used to take the first 5 or more minutes of his class with banter about anything that struck the students' fancy when they entered his room. Sports were often the major topic; however it would move elsewhere when students initiated the shift. Then, when the lesson started it was all business for an hour. I often visited this class to see it in action. The number of bathroom breaks students took in all the classes I saw- ZERO.

Both teachers recognized the need to meet students where they were emotionally. When we combine this with exploring topics in small groups, thinking became truly thoughtful.



Bev's Findings

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Competencies: What are the key issues?

"Education is now recognized as one of the critical drivers for social and economic change" (Grose & Freedman, 2014: 34). Education experts caution, "If we want learners who can thrive in turbulent, complex times, apply thinking to new situations, and change the world, we must reimagine learning", (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018:13). To ensure that education meets the needs of today's pupils and informs their aspirations for the future, both personal and professional, then we need to re-think learning. We are preparing students to be leaders in tomorrow's world.

What should be the key pedagogies and strategies required by teachers, enabling pupils to develop global competencies? How do school leaders and municipal/system leaders need to engage teachers to support a connected, digital and knowledge economy, and a sustainable, productive healthy society?

McKinsey and Company (2017) cautions that 60% of all occupations have at least 30% of activities that technically can be automated, potentially affecting 50% of the world's economy. Technology and digital demands are part of this changing workforce and highly skilled employees will benefit. This will be a 'disruptive innovation'; changing the way we work, and interact (Christensen, Raynor & McDonald, 2015). OECD (2016) encourages educators to look beyond digital skills, (referring to performing the task or concept in a defined setting), towards embedding digital competencies (dealing with application in a broader frame and new unfamiliar situations involving judgement and attitudes).

Globally, education systems face the challenge of responding to rapidly changing societies, made even more difficult because the task of education is in part to prepare young people for a future, which is unknown and often unpredictable. Educators, futurists, and policy planners are already defining what global competencies assist pupils to succeed in the 21st century.

More than an end in itself, education is a means to deliver our vision of tomorrow. It is the foundation for promoting development, reducing economic disparities, and creating a society of inclusiveness. It forms the fourth United Nations Goal of Sustainable Development to, "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, SDG4, 2015). The OECD (2017) suggests rethinking and re-envisioning the skills, attitudes, attributes, and knowledge that will enable today's pupils to be engaged, productive citizens in a global economy.

What are the skills and knowledge required by today's learners for tomorrow's rapidly changing, diverse, interconnected, and digital world? What are the century global competencies to educate today's learners to be effective global citizens? "How can education systems best support the kind of teaching that develops those skills?" What is the role of teachers in leading innovation?" (OECD, 2016:3). What are the attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding required for tomorrow's teachers? How do schools develop creativity, critical thinking and collaboration? What are the new considerations for policy and practice?

Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at OECD, mused about reimagining the teacher profession by building and incorporating innovative practices¹. Building collective efficacy was confirmed by Di Cecco and Freedman (2013), in *Collaborative School Reviews*. Teachers have to be involved in discussions around the purposes and practices of gathering and using evidence of learning including Learning Walks. This strategy involves collegial monitoring and coaching. Data drives action.

Education is shifting from institutions emphasizing teaching to ones focused on learning. The next transformation will be to institutions of thinking and 21st century global skills/competencies. This will require a balance of effective evidence-based practices, reliance on student data, and emerging learner-centric pedagogies, structures and practices (Grose, 2016). Digital literacy and networked digital technologies build on traditional literacy and mathematical skills. An increasingly diverse population and workplace requires renewed emphasis on social emotional skills, teambuilding, conflict resolution, and shared leadership. Expected and unexpected labour market changes will add to the pressure for transformative change in (cont on page 3)



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BEV'S FINDING (CONTINUED)

developing a skilled and educated workforce. Intentionally closing achievement and academic gaps for underserved and underachieving cohorts are critical for equity and excellence to become transformative. "Teachers will spend less time as information providers" and more as "learning coaches" in assisting pupils through mentoring, encouraging, and supporting pupils (Brooks & Holmes, 2014: 29).

OECD's 2018 analysis of the *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)* describes the trends shaping education. Recognizing that the world is more connected, diverse, urbanized, and technologically integrated and advanced, teachers report lacking the skills and knowledge to move the 21st Century agenda forward. The TALIS survey responses indicate teachers feel unprepared, in specific areas including:

- Dealing with ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse classrooms,
- Providing an inclusionary classroom, teaching and supporting pupils with special needs,
- Focusing on supporting the incorporation of the effective use of information and communication technologies (ICT) into schools and classrooms,
- Enabling pupils to access and apply these new technologies in the workplace using experiential learning¹, and
- Incorporating collaborative problem solving and critical thinking into pedagogical practices.

The World Bank's 2018, *Learning to Realize Education's Promise* identifies these areas for teacher capacity building to support developing Global Competencies:

- Improving teacher-learner interactions and increasing learner voice,
- Using achievement data to measure learning along with the metrics of delivery as a gauge to know whether the approaches are working,
- Working collaboratively using metrics of learning for improvement,
- Analysing the evidence to go deeper into the learning, and
- Engaging communities respectfully.

The research literature scan supported the following competencies that teachers will require to ensure pupils receive global competencies to prepare them for 21st century living and learning:

- Collaborative professionalism involving shared problem-solving and decision making,
- Refining pedagogical skills to engage and challenge students' critical thinking,
- Designing rich, authentic experiential learning opportunities,
- Enabling digitally connected and integrated learning environments,
- Creating inclusive, respectful learning environments to foster and support culturally, ethnically, linguistically diverse classrooms and strengthen learner voice and respond to learners' needs and abilities, and
- Connecting and engaging respectfully with communities.

As learning increases in complexity, schools and school systems must transition to more agile, adaptive, and dynamic learning environments. Opportunities need to be created to allow teachers' exploration, growth and risk-taking in the learning process. School and system leaders need to provide opportunities for teachers to work together on improving outcomes, personalize their own professional learning designs, and encourage creative thinking by providing time for ideas to evolve (Grose & Freedman, 2014).

Professional collaboration can enhance student outcomes. The analysis from TALIS indicates the importance of teachers' self-efficacy. PISA data show "that teachers' sense of self-efficacy – their belief in the ability to teach, engage students, and manage a classroom – has an impact on student achievement and motivation" (OECD, 2015: 41). It influences teachers' own practices, enthusiasm for teaching and commitment. The PISA/TALIS analysis found that teachers' positive relationships with other teachers in school increase their sense of self-efficacy (OECD, 2015). Additionally, teachers' "ability to participate in decision-making at school is significantly related to a strong increase in teachers' job-satisfaction" (OECD, 2015: 47). This needs to be intentional. Teachers require interactive opportunities to collaborate on classroom materials that influence classroom learning.

These opportunities can mitigate the negative effects of challenging classrooms (OECD, 2015). Enabling positive collaboration supports teachers' ability to persevere and overcome workload stressors. "Much of this literature on teachers' resilience defines it as an adaptive response to stress and adversity; the ability to 'bounce back'" (Faukner & Latham, 2016: 144). Ingersoll, Ingersoll, Dougherty and Sirinides (2017) in their analysis of nearly one million teachers' responses found that when teachers' roles in decision-making, professional learning and leadership are shared, student achievement and engagement increase. Teachers and administrators need preparation and guidance to initiate and sustain change dynamics. They need to be engaged as collaborative partners in the school improvement process (Di Cecco & Freedman, 2013). This requires moving from congenial to authentic, collaborative, reciprocal relationships. For school development, it means trusting relationships, joint input, and shared decision-making so concerns can be raised without reprisals. In this way, teachers are engaged and share in accountability for school improvement/development. Inquiry can be one way to begin meaningful professional collaboration. (cont. on insert)

An Elementary Teacher's Experience in Schools

As we live in a world with unprecedented times, to progress in this climate it is important to be as adaptive and flexible as possible.

As an elementary teacher working in a TDSB school full time, the experience is more different than I had ever imagined. We went from being social creatures at work who shared so many cooperative group experiences, to transforming our work ethic to match Covid-19 protocols. As a result, PPE has really altered what it means to be social creatures. It is gloomy and lonely at times, especially eating lunch in your room alone and having meetings virtually while being in the same building. But we are all adapting and creating innovative ways to teach and make coming to school worthwhile. It's amazing to see the extent to which classroom learning has evolved to include experiential learning outside and individualized learning at a desk. This pandemic may have taken all the social activities away from us; however, I give educators credit for uncovering innovative ways to keep learning experience alive. For example, we lost our transitional Hallowe'en parade, but compensated with classroom fun and webcasts alongside having a more intimate Remembrance Day ceremony in class. We are advancing and creating innovative digital citizens of society.

The secret to being an educator through this pandemic is the balance between work and "me time" to ensure health and well-being are persevered. Personally, I've picked up some new activities and routines during this pandemic which I continue to practise once home from work. This helps shift my mind from work with its challenges to the inclusion some self-reflection and personal care. Possibilities include activities such as cooking a gourmet salad, to reading a book, or going for a jog. Ensuring there are 10-15 minutes of self-care during these difficult times will make any day a breeze. I salute all the educators, students, parents, and front-line workers for doing their best to ensure we are all safe and healthy physically, emotionally, and mentally.

Nehal Patel

Spelling Bee Gone Virtual:

As Chapter Presidents of East York and North York East Spelling Bee, we strive to coach students and prepare them for the Spelling Bee in the spring. Unfortunately, this year it was cancelled due to the pandemic. Students worked really hard to prepare for a competition which was put on hold. A resumption was finally announced in October which meant extra effort for the students to get back into routine and refresh all 500 words. It was a very interesting experience to have it resume virtually while ensuring that we maintained online integrity. A lot of preparation went into ensuring the success of the event. East York was one of the first bees to go virtual. It was definitely an experience that has both pros and cons. But I must say to have students compete and make it to the finals and see their enthusiasm, positive energy, and smiles made it all worthwhile.

The pros of having a virtual bee is beneficial with respect to having it in the comfort of your home. Stage fright is also reduced and the participants are only spelling in front of the officials and no other audience. With regards to the officials' table, the technical aspect was transparent as the words and checklist for who proceeded and who did not was displayed on a google doc. Systematically, some of the roles were replaced by the computer but it was very effective.

One of the cons of a virtual spelling bee is that students cannot all be in the same room when spelling so they cannot hear the other spellers so the same errors can be repeated. As well, students also don't get much of a social platform to interact with their peers as they would at the actual bee. Ensuring integrity in the spelling of the word is also difficult to verify. Congratulating the winners in person is not possible, nor is the awarding of the prizes.

Overall, the experience was smooth and having a great supportive team made the experience so much more worthwhile. I commend the students for working hard and adapting to our new ways. Thank you to our students and amazing officials. Thanks too, to the Spelling Bee of Canada for continuing to make this type of involvement and experience available for communities across Canada.

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