

# **Literacy Connections:**

## **Ripples on the Pond**

### **A Family Literacy Conference**

Presented by the [Victoria READ Society](#)

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### **A Family Literacy Conference**

*Compiled by Helen Thomas*

[Victoria READ Society](#)

Sponsored by the [Victoria READ Society](#),  
Vancouver Island Reading Association,  
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Ellen Szita (copyright October 1999 by Ellen Szita)  
Julie Lawson (copyright October 1999 by Julie Lawson)

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# Literacy Connections: Ripples on the Pond

## Introduction

The second annual Literacy Conference on October 22, 1999, was another success. It met the objectives as outlined in the cost-shared proposal, and in fact exceeded our desire to bring together the various groups in the Greater Victoria Community who are concerned about literacy. I would like to comment on this endeavour, and strongly recommend that this be our continued focus for succeeding years.

This success was achieved by applying the following strategies:

- 1) The formation of an advisory committee, established to assist the planning committee in setting theme, conference title, concept and logo, identifying potential keynote speakers and workshop presenters. While I did not attend most of these meetings, it seems that the participants on this committee brought a high level of energy and enthusiasm and commitment to the goals and success of the conference. Participants included both professors and doctoral candidates from the University of Victoria's Education Department, reading specialists in two of the three school districts, a representative from the Confederation of Victoria Parent Advisory Committees, and representatives from [Project Literacy Victoria](#), and [Victoria READ Society](#). This committee was important because it was the means by which we could include additional stakeholders without asking a long term commitment. As a member of the initial planning group, I was very pleased that we were able to host a conference that showcased what we are all doing about literacy – be it in the community, in the schools, in the university, and in the family.

### Recommendations:

- Representatives from each of the above groups be invited to participate in the planning and be partners in hosting the conference again.
  - The original intent of separating the advisory committee and the planning committee, partly to avoid taking up too much time from the participants of the advisory committee, was eventually dropped in favour of combining the two groups. People on the planning committee felt that the development of the concept and theme should be shared by both groups, and because of the high level of enthusiasm and interest in this conference, it was agreed that both groups should be included in these important decisions.
  - The planning committee include representatives from each sector and that the notion of a separate advisory group be dropped.
- 2) In addition to the planning and advisory committees, further inclusion of community groups was achieved by having parents of children in receipt of bursary funding at Victoria READ Society help in preparing the conference packages, gifts for presenters, signage and name tags. Also, the Volunteer Teaching Squad, a group of

volunteer education students from UVIC, assisted on conference day with registration, introducing and thanking presenters, and providing directions for workshop rooms. Catering was provided by the students in the Food Services program at Claremont, our conference venue, and lunch time entertainment was provided by two Claremont music students.

**Recommendation:**

- The committee continue to seek ways to involve students, parents, businesses and community supporters in the conference.

Melanie Austin  
Executive Director, [Victoria READ Society](#)

## Reports

### Public Relations

I offered to take on the job of conference pr and promotions and have the following report:

- 1) **Conference theme and logo:** In March, the advisory committee quickly adopted the theme of community involvement in literacy education, recognizing that this is an issue that crosses the boundaries between school, university, community and other programs. “Literacy Connections: Ripples on a Pond” was chosen as the conference title.
- 2) **Flier:** In June, a flier containing the main information was produced based on last year’s design, and included the Keynote speakers and most of the workshop presenters, the time, place, and date of the Conference. This was copied and counted into bundles of 25 and placed in 8 1/2 x 11 envelopes addressed to the principal of each school in the three districts. A cover letter was included with each envelope, describing the upcoming conference and asking the principal to have a flier inserted in each teacher’s box. We also requested that the PAC chair for each school receive the flier. The envelopes were then sorted alphabetically within each of the three school districts, and taken to the three board offices for delivery through their school mail.
- 3) **Logo:** A student at Rogers Elementary School was asked to design a graphic to represent our theme. The logo was presented to the committee in August.
- 4) **Registration Form design:** In August, I received the information from the planning committee for the registration form and did a draft lay out on Pagemaker. Then I took it to Fotoprint and asked them to do a final lay out and make it more professional looking. They presented a draft that included the Logo, but the designer had also included ripples that stretched across the entire brochure. It was obvious when I looked at the draft that everything looked great except the logo. I had a second draft made without the logo, and it was much better. I decided to go to print without the conference logo.

- 5) **Registration Form distribution:** the form was ready for distribution by the end of August, although we missed getting it to the 2-day literacy institute held on August 27 and 28th by one day. We had 1500 printed, and once again school packages were made up with 10 registration forms per school. A letter was included, addressed to the school principal and/or the pro-d rep, asking to have the forms distributed so that staff would be informed.
- 6) **VCPAC meeting:** Helen and Pat Ebbels went to the September VCPAC (Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Committees) to promote the conference. They encouraged the members to take the information back to their individual PACs.
- 7) **Phone Calls:** committee members were asked to phone two or three schools each to discuss the conference with the principal or a pro-d rep and to encourage registration. Where possible, they were also asked to explain our reduced rate for parents, adding that subsidies were available when requested, and that free day care was also available.
- 8) **Public Service Announcements:** In September, a PSA was designed and faxed to all the media outlets, including radio, community tv, newspapers and bulletin boards. We requested that they posted the notice by the first week of October.
- 9) **Registration Forms:** by October we worried about low registration, and had a meeting to discuss further marketing strategies. It was decided to print another 2,000 copies of the registration form. A special meeting of **READ** staff was called, and each teacher was asked to take bundles of forms to schools in Saanich and Victoria by Tuesday, the 19th before 3:00 pm and ask to have one form put in each teacher's box, and one in the PAC box. This took about 1,200 forms. It was important that the forms be hand-delivered so that teachers would receive it in time to make plans for Friday.
- 10) **Faxing:** because of our concern about low registration, we asked the three school districts to do broadcast faxes to each of the schools with our registration information. This took place the week before the conference.
- 11) **Advertising:** we asked the Times Colonist to print free ads the weekend before the conference, based on our initial flier developed in June. They printed the ad twice: once on Tuesday, October 19, and again on Thursday, the 21st. They were included as a conference sponsor on the ad, as well as on the program. Helen placed conference information on First Class for BC and Alberta Community Literacy groups; **NALD** posted conference information on their web site, and we posted the conference registration form on our web site, just two weeks before the conference date.
- 12) **Program:** The camera ready was designed and printed by Helen, and each of the sponsors were acknowledged for their support on the back page. The program was printed for free by Monk OFFICE SUPPLY Ltd.

### **Recommendations:**

- There is still some question about the design of an ongoing conference logo. I suggest that we hire a professional graphic designer to follow up on the ripples concept based on the registration form we used this year.
- We should print 2,500 copies of the registration form in August and distribute it to all the teachers in each of the three districts, instead of sending 10 and then doing more later. In an effort to save money initially, we ended up spending more.
- The conference registration form and information should be posted on our web site at least one to two months in advance of the conference.
- We should attempt to get a radio interview on either CBC or Q100.3 the week of the conference. This might include one of the workshop presenters, one of our students, or one of the Keynote presenters.
- In an effort to involve more businesses, we might include a major sponsor (such as Starbucks) and have handbills or fliers available at their sites.....or maybe bookmarks with literacy ideas on one side, and conference information on the flip side???

Melanie Austin

Executive Director, [Victoria READ Society](#)

### **Registration**

In early September, registration forms were sent to all area schools and to registrants from last year's conference. Registration commenced early in September and continued up until the day of the conference. Registration forms were processed at the READ office on Linden Avenue.

The day prior to the conference, two bursary parent volunteers and two people associated with the conference assembled approximately 220 registration packages. Each package contained an agenda and presenter information, a site map, paper and pen, a READ brochure, a bookmark, a name tag, a conference evaluation form, payment receipt, and a raffle ticket. The Greater Victoria School District donated the pocket file folders in which the above items were placed. Each package was identified with the registrant's name and placed alphabetically in boxes for easy distribution the following morning. Unpaid registrants' information/packages were kept in a separate box in order to ensure that payment was made at the conference. Packages were also prepared for presenters, volunteers, READ staff, and conference committee members and again kept in separate boxes to ensure easy distribution.

People handling conference registration arrived early on the day of the conference to set up the registration area. We were fortunate in obtaining the services of the Volunteer Teaching Squad, a group of pre-teachers from the University of Victoria, to assist with handing out registration packages. One volunteer was assigned to each box and explained the contents of the package to registrants. Signs were posted indicating where registrants could pick up their packages. A READ staff person accepted money from late

registrants and made out on-site receipts. Approximately 15 people registered on site or paid for late registrations.

On the whole, the registration proceeded smoothly. One person's package was miss-filed, resulting in some initial confusion, but this was later resolved with the person receiving their paid receipt. One person claimed to have registered but no package was found. This person was admitted, with their registration to be followed-up later by the READ staff.

**Recommendation:**

Unfortunately, we neglected to bring the book in which all registrations were recorded, so it was difficult to obtain information on site concerning payment and receipt of registration forms. This book should be brought to the site for reference in case of discrepancies.

Jan McFarland

**Secretary/Reception**

My duties for the "Literacy Connections: Ripples on the Pond" conference on October 22, 1999, involved giving out information to prospective registrants, writing, editing and organizing written materials on the conference, mailing information to schools and other appropriate organizations, and registering teachers and interested members of the community. As a front-line worker, someone who was dealing with the public directly, I was expected to know a great deal about the details of the conference, as well as be able to give out that information in a way that was clear and accessible. Outlined below are areas that, in my opinion, may need clarification for next year's conference.

1. The question I was asked most frequently was in regard to signing up for the individual speakers. Perhaps next year it would be helpful to state on the registration form itself that it's festival seating (or to have a sign-up process for individual speakers).
2. The second most frequently asked question had to do with at what time the individual sessions began and ended. This information might need to be on the registration form itself, or at least be made available to reception as soon as information goes out to the community.
3. Many of the registrants had concerns about confirmation. In the week leading up to the conference, and the week of the conference, I had many calls from people wanting to make sure they were registered, as they had mailed, or faxed, in their registration forms and hadn't heard anything back from us. A process of confirmation might be an idea for next year – even if it is merely a card we mail back to people with their name, the day and time of the conference, and confirmation of payment. This process would be a good idea if there was a sign-up procedure for individual speakers, as we could confirm at that time in what sessions people were registered.

4. Next year it would be very helpful to know in advance more about the on-site daycare, such as what ages it is for, how many workers will be in attendance, if snacks are provided, what sort of activities are planned, etc.

Overall, the conference was very successful, despite early concerns regarding low registration numbers. I think that if we send information packages to individual teachers – that is, a pamphlet for each teacher at each school, rather than a couple of pamphlets to each school – our registration numbers will increase for next year's conference.

Julie Lambert

### **Childminding Service**

The childminding service at the conference was a great success. There were 5 children in all - two sisters, two boys who knew each other from school, and Jessie the baby (ranging in age from 11 months to 11 years). I had brought a lot of stuff for the kids to do which kept them busy while they pretty much entertained themselves. Thanks to Jan for the large box of Lego. The entire day was calm, cool, and collected. There was only one crying incident which was solved with a time-tested and highly effective early childhood intervention strategy: give the kids a cookie.

The success of the childminding service was due, in no small part, to the wonderful assistance from Volunteer Teaching Squad. All those who volunteered were absolutely great with the kids - playing with them and otherwise being available to help. Many thanks and bouquets to the VTS!

Based on my observations, I think that all participants had a great time (I know I did). The parent of the sisters commented that her children enjoyed their stay despite their initial reservations about "daycare" (the children didn't have any daycare experience). When mom took the sisters down to the conference they asked to be taken back to the "daycare room". Jessie's mom (Kim from Discovery Toys) said this was the first conference that she had put Jessie into a daycare (most conferences don't offer any childminding service). Kim was at first nervous but soon relaxed. She came up occasionally to feed Jessie.

All went well. A good time was had by all.

Terry Rennie

### **Entertainment**

Since the conference location was at Claremont School, it was decided that music students from the school would be asked to perform during the lunch break.

The initial letter of request was sent to Mrs. L. Giles, the principal, in September. She passed the request on to the music director, Mr. Brian Kilikelly. He gladly found two students who agreed to play the piano for the 45-minute luncheon break.

Gift certificates from Ward Music on Fort Street (for the sum of \$20.00) were provided as honorariums for each performer. I would recommend contacting a different source for donations, if this is to be done again.

Letters of thanks were written to Claremont School, Ward Music (Vancouver store and Victoria store).

Sue O'Reilly

## **Workshops & Keynotes**

The keynotes received rave reviews on evaluations and word of mouth seemed to be equally enthusiastic. Ellen set a wonderful tone for the conference and Julie Lawson tied everything together at the end with an inspiring speech.

Workshops were very well received. Some were attended by only a few people while others were over subscribed. Generally the variety of topics and excellence of the speakers was praised. We did not close off workshops this year.

## **Door Prizes**

Door prizes were supplied by local authors, Julie Lawson and Nikki Tate, Orca Books, TOLD(Take on Learning Disabilities) and Literacy Services of Canada Ltd. These books seemed to be appreciated and having the VTS handing them out seemed to make things go quickly and smoothly.

## **Catering**

Claremont Secondary School catered for us for the day and Starbucks provided coffee. The students' enthusiasm was commented on frequently in the evaluations. Similarly conference attendees were really impressed by the quality of the food. The only negative comment was about quantity, particularly the amount of salad. We paid for food for 225 people, but my estimate would have been that slightly less than 200 people were eating.

## **Recommendations for Next Year**

(Includes items learned from previous conferences)

- Schedule who is staffing READ table
  - ✓ ensure a teacher is available to answer questions, particularly first thing in the morning (this was the busy time)
- Schedule who is taking care of the money
- Remember:
  - ✓ cash box
  - ✓ change
  - ✓ receipt book
  - ✓ MasterCard/Visa slips and machine
  - ✓ masking tape, pens, felt pen(s), blank coloured paper
  - ✓ camera and film?
- List necessary things for each station
- Type out information for those who are introducing/thanking
  - ✓ ensure they have thank you card, gift, honorarium, evaluation forms
- Ensure someone has checked to see all necessary equipment is in each room
- Organize water for each room if possible or at least at breaks and a table on the stage for water, speaker items
- Ensure a podium in good condition is available for the keynote speaker
- Have a technician available and ensure overhead, sound, lighting or other technology is working correctly
- Handouts were very important to people
- Have as many pertinent displays as possible and items for sale if possible
- Leave a message on the answering machine to say that we/you are closed because of the conference, say if sold out or if not price, location, times etc.

## **Ellen Szita's Morning Keynote Address**

Twelve years ago if someone had said I'd be talking in front of an audience on the subject of literacy, I probably would have looked at them as being a lot more stupid than I was feeling at the time. There would be two reasons for that, I couldn't do it, impossible! And who would ever care enough to listen to what I had to say, and want to help me have a new way of life.

My father once told me, you're a stupid idiot, but you don't have to go opening your mouth proving it to everyone.

And for well over forty years, I never did. Shame, guilt, fear, loneliness, low-selfworth, and much more followed me for most of my life, because I believed what my parents and teachers at that time told me. You're dumb and will never amount to anything!

For those who do not know me, I came from a family of eight children and I am the only one to have taken a grade twelve. But not until I was in my forties.

They say you are what you are taught and in many cases this is true. My mother died not being able to write or spell. My father's education was also very limited. As were my grandparents before them. I myself left school at 14 years of age, and went to work in a factory. At that time my reading skills were anywhere between grade 5 and 7. Math and spelling were at a much lower level. I was taught at an early age that education was not important for women because the role I would play in life needed no academic skills. My role would be to marry, have children and take care of household duties. I remember clearly when I attended school, that 15 hours a week for all girls in high school were devoted to needlework and cooking. I also remember the boys in their last year of schooling being told which factories were hiring, since at that time it was an industrial world. No one could have foreseen that society would change drastically, economically, socially, and morally and people like myself would be caught in the middle of these drastic changes.

I was a very depressed teenager and at fifteen years of age I attempted suicide. This is the first time I have ever admitted this to an audience. My own family didn't find out until many years later. At age 18 wanting desperately to escape my shame, guilt and depression, I immigrated to this country. I thought I was escaping from it all. I had no idea that all the pain and fear I carried was imbedded within my heart and soul, and immigrated right along with me.

Eventually, I married and for a long time it was a safe place for me. However, this did not last and I found myself a single parent of four children. My false world of security was gone and my dark secret of illiteracy revealed.

Shame and guilt lay heavily on my shoulders when I was unable to help the children with their homework. Then I put the onus of their failure on their teachers. I was too ashamed to admit to my own children that I could not help them.

“Illiteracy breeds illiteracy”

I was illiterate, depressed, with very low self esteem. I couldn't help my children with their homework, and consequently three of my four children dropped out of school between grades 7-10. Being a single parent I frantically looked for work only to be fired from two jobs when it was discovered my reading was very poor and my spelling even worse. The shame became so great, I gave up trying, and lived on welfare for eight very long years. Yet as much as it was degrading for me, it became another safe place to be. And I truly thought I would grow old and die collecting social assistance.

Someone once wrote, watch your thoughts, they may become your words, then your words may become your actions, then your actions in turn become a habit. Habits can become your character. Then watch your character because it could become your destiny.

Illiteracy can be a crippling disease! Because what most people take for granted, many cannot. Millions of people in this country lack the "skills needed to use printed material commonly found at work, at home, and in the community." Many cannot read or write at all. That's rather frightening since it means there is a great deal of pain in our society. Why? Because it is a very different world for those who lack academic skills. It is an alien world of loneliness, fear, anger, and humiliation, not to mention low self-worth, lack of confidence (if any) and much more.

For example: imagine not being able to read traffic signs, and street names, (this would leave you lost) walking into a restaurant and ordering from the menu, (now we're embarrassed) finding a phone number in case of an emergency, a parent trying to read the label on a medicine bottle in order to give a sick child medication, reading safety instructions, (now we're afraid) writing out cheques, paying bills, reading a lease in order to rent. (now we're ashamed). Often we are asked to fill out forms, such as applications when applying for a job, making up a resume, applying for a drivers licence, filling out forms for U.I.C., and even welfare. Not to mention the fear of entering a bank or library. But then many don't. (Now we're angry).

Not being able to read or write is like being blind, but blind people are recognized and helped accordingly, also many blind people can read.

What is even more frightening is the lack of awareness the public seemed to have as to how large a problem it is and to where this kind of pain can lead. It is not uncommon for chemical abuse, emotional disorder and even violence to grow out of illiteracy. It is no secret that almost fifty percent of people incarcerated are at a grade 8 education or lower.

Some time back I went to visit the inmates at Wilkinson Road to discuss education. While I was there a young man shared with me that prior to him being incarcerated, he had applied to go back to school to finish his grade twelve but was told he didn't qualify. He shared this with me because he found an irony in the fact he not only fully qualified now, but was in his second year university. However, as he put it, at a much greater cost!

The cost to the tax payers in Canada is over \$10 billion dollars annually because of illiteracy, not to mention the personal cost that can be devastating and a cycle often continued over generations.

Canada has a huge literacy problem. Three national surveys since 1987 plus mountains of studies have produced overwhelming evidence to the serious size and nature of the literacy problem. Millions of adults can't read well enough to handle the challenges of everyday life in the late 1990's, much less in the looming knowledge society. One in five high-school graduates is in the same boat; among high school dropouts, the numbers are probably twice that. And many children before even starting kindergarten are already behind. And one in four children before they hit age eleven, is struggling with learning or behavioral problems that hamper literacy.

Another report I recently read that was prepared for both federal and provincial health ministers, stands as the most thorough documents yet demonstrated, using detailed research studies, how Canadians health status often hinges on a variety of factors such as their gender, income, and education.

The report urges governments to invest more money on ways to keep Canadians healthy - with greater emphasis on early childhood education and programs for youth such as employment opportunities. The report went on to say there are very disturbing trends in the psychosocial well-being of Canadian youth. Some being alcohol abuse, crime, drugs and a high rate of suicides. 50% of all adolescent suicides had previously been diagnosed as having learning disabilities. The report went on to say one of the biggest contributing factors to 35% of our teenagers dropping out of school is due to low self esteem. Dropping out of school early can be very harmful for their future health. Many won't get good employment and there's a definite link between income and health. Furthermore, 20% of recent high school graduates have literacy skills too low for entry-level jobs. The chances are these young adults will have short lived jobs. Too many short lived jobs is a very negative message. The report urges governments to recognize the warning signs that many of Canada's young are greatly troubled. Furthermore, of all those adults needing greater academic skills only 5% are being reached. And there is a defiant link between children coming from learned parents and not so learned. Something I myself have known for years, parents having low literacy skills, their children often have difficulties at school.

And how many people are aware 80 percent of Canadians over the age of sixty five have low literacy skills. And these people are the one's most likely to have to read instructions on taking medication.

There are many reason for low academic skills. learning difficulties, poverty, emotional disorder, but whatever the reason, we know now that unlike the past we have to be able to read and write in order to survive. Because of this we are discovering more people have learning disabilities than we ever realized.

And with our modern day technology changing rapidly, even learned people are having difficulty in keeping with the times. where does that leave adult learners and children with learning disabilities. The answer is obvious, they are being left further and further behind. And we are not talking about hundreds or thousands in this country, we are talking into the millions. Bearing in mind people are also living much longer than ever before.

**AND FOR ME PERSONALLY, I HAVE THE SENSE WE ARE ALREADY RACING AGAINST TIME.**

If changes are not implement in the very near future, in twenty years we could well see a huge gap between the employed and unemployed. And when we talk of unemployment we're talking anger and depression, I know I've been there.

I'm sure we would all agree that much like cancer, early detection is the best cure. We get to see specialists and they prescribe what's the best way to go about healing our aliment. However, that is not the message that many parents are receiving with children having hardships at school.

Let me give you a perfect example of something that happened just recently.

This is about a young boy whose name is Jordon. At the age of two his mother realized he could not speak. After seeing several specialists he had surgery on both his ears. This was followed by years of speech therapy. Later it was discovered he had poor vision and needed glasses. He was also found to have many allergies and allergic to penicillin. During this time it was also revealed he had great difficulty in comprehending as to what was being said to him. Jordon failed Kindergarten, I didn't know that was possible. Because of this he went through many tests. And his mother was told he has a severe learning disability. Jordon is a very loving sensitive nine year old boy lost in a world of academic skills. Although he has a devoted mother who tends to his emotional needs, surgeons and therapist for his medical concerns, if Jordon is to stand up and be counted in this vast universe of ever changing technology, it will only be through academic skills with specialist teachers.

Yet while Jordon was attending school receiving five hours a week with two aid teachers, he was cut back to one and a half hours per week. This was done without his mother's knowledge. Only because two aid teachers and two classrooms teachers approached his mother recommending he have more than five hours a week did she know he had been cut back. The mother approached the principal and she was told there were others like Jordon, many others like Jordon who also needed help and there wasn't enough funding to go around. This took place at just ONE school.

What price is the government now putting upon our children's heads? Because for all the Jordan's out there, we may end up paying a far greater one and at what emotional cost. When I went back to school twelve years ago searching for a better way of life, I didn't see it as a cost, I thought as a mother of four it was an investment not only for myself but my family as well. I saw it as a long term interest-bearing bond on human life which pays both social and economic dividends.

Jordon's mother had to find another school for him. After MUCH red tape and meeting with various people she was able to get him into Hillcrest School. Jordon was very upset by this because he had made good friends and didn't want to change schools. Furthermore, what did it say for Jordon's self-esteem to be told the school couldn't help him.

Moreover, Jordon's mother just happens to work in a field where she knew who to contact to get him the help he needed, but even at that there was multiple red tape she had to go through. Also he has a grandmother who knew where to go, to get him on a bursary fund which was at the [READ Society](#). But what happens to parents who don't know where to go for help and get lost in a world of red tape because someone put a price on their child's life. Because that's how my daughter and I see it. Jordon is my grandson!!

As result of this experience, I'm left with a haunting question. Are we a nation in denial? We talk about abuse and protecting our children's rights. Well, "EDUCATION IS NOT A PRIVILEGE, IT IS A BIRTH RIGHT."

So when I hear of cutbacks, I have to ask myself, is the public aware that it is not education the government is cutting back on, but the quality of peoples lives and our greatest treasures, our children, OUR future generation.

However, it's not all gloom and doom, Jordon loves to play hockey, and last year their team came out on top. And I insist on telling you how that happened. Jordon plays goal keeper and in the first period of their last game of the season, Jordon had seven goals scored against him. He was so upset he asked his coach to put someone else in goalie, the coach graciously complied but asked Jordon to stay in the game. Jordon did, and scored a hat trick in the second period and two goals in the third and yes they won the finals. I tell you this story because many of these children much like adult learners also have their talents. I believe a child's talents need to be encouraged especially children having difficulties in learning. I think it's crucial for their self-esteem.

I recently read an article written by one of our great hockey players, Ken Dryden. I'd like to read it to you because his feelings were mine exactly: He went on to write, lifelong learning is first of all an attitude toward learning. For most people, that comes from their experience in school: that's what they associate learning with. If they learned well in school, they think they can learn out of school and in their futures. If they didn't learn well in school, their self-esteem plummets, and they will do anything possible to avoid the

situation where they are asked to learn again. The feeling of being dumb in school never goes away.

Having read that it left me asking two critical questions that's been on my mind for sometime. How is it that our children are being asked to learn far more than we ever did, **BUT IN THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME?** And if that's the case, are our children receiving the basic foundations of learning to read and write as we did.

Because of what I experienced through lack of an education, within the first few weeks of entering school at the [READ Society](#), I was asked if I'd be willing to be interviewed by a reporter. Through this interview I learned I was far from being alone. And the thought of anyone suffering as I had suffered gave me courage to become very involved in the literacy movement and I started representing learners through out British Columbia.

Part of my representing learners was to speak at a Peter Gzowski Golf Tournament. In the audience at that time was a man named Robert Duncan. He was shocked to hear the illiteracy rate was so high in this country. As Robert is a film director he decided to make the film 'Ellen's Story' in hoping to play his part in making a greater awareness to the seriousness of low academic skills.

I mention this because it took Robert over a year to make the film and it was a lot of hard work for him. However, his hard work paid off and the film won the Gold Plaque Award at the Chicago Film Festival, the silver in Houston, Texas and was also nominated for the A.C.E. award. The film has been shown throughout North America many parts of Europe and Africa. It can also be found in a public library, colleges, and universities and many other organizations. This pleases me because it can be viewed in the privacy of ones home.

Robert took a **RISK** and it paid off for him. Risks is something we do everyday of our lives. When I first entered school a very dear friend of mine gave me something to read; his sponsor had given it to him when he first went into A.A. And I would particularly like to read it to you all, especially adult learners that may be here today.

## RISKS

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.

To place your ideas, your dreams, before a crowd is to risk their loss.

To love is to risk not being love in return.

To live is to risk dying.

To hope is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken for the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing and is nothing.

They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they cannot learn, feel, change,  
grow, love, and live.

Chained by their attitudes, they are a slave;  
They have forfeited their freedom.  
Only a person who risks is truly free.

The dear friend who gave me that died at the age of thirty seven of alcoholism. He never risked having a new way of life.

I am fifty eight years old and it has been a long hard road in turning my life around. It has been painful and humiliating. However, today I have my grade twelve and have been sober for nearly sixteen years and have become a very productive person.

I started at the [Victoria R.E.A.D Society](#), then went on to Camosun College. And received help from volunteer tutors from Project Literacy Victoria. Those teachers caring attitudes had a great impact on my life, a far cry from what I experienced as a child. I watched in awe over the years, students low self-worth grow into laughter, many friendships, and most important of all confidence. Those incredible teachers gave us a chance to a life that most of us once, only dreamed about.

Later my sister joined me in my class, one of my daughters also went on to the READ Society and with the help of tutors completed her grade twelve, she now works in the world of high technology and is presently working on the 2K. My oldest daughter is a supervisor for a pre-school program for children with special needs. Interestingly enough when my daughter finished high school, I was told by her teachers she was not college material and that it would be too stressful for her.

You know there once was a young man, who was once said about him by his principal, that he had a muddled and confused mind and would produce nothing to life. He received the strap so many times in the first three months of school that he dropped out at age seven. By the time he was twelve he became deaf because of the many beatings by his peers. Later in his years he chose not to have it corrected because he said, he found he could think better in silence. He patented over 1,093 inventions. That man was Thomas Edison. Interestingly enough, when I think of Thomas, I think of a human being who saw beyond his darkness and invented his own light.

And what of the person who wore long robes instead of fashionable clothing because he claimed they were more comfortable. He had great difficulty in holding down a job because he had trouble in finishing what he started. People looked upon him as somewhat strange. This weird person, invented the helicopter, snorkel, army tank and cannon. He was also one of the greatest artists of our time. His name was, Leonardo da Vinci.

And how about the little boy who couldn't understand basic math, couldn't tie his own shoelaces, he hated to wear socks because he said they bothered him. His teachers told

him he would never amount to anything. His mother had to walk him to school everyday until age thirteen. He was also the greatest genius of our time, Albert Einstein.

No we are not all geniuses but I share this with you because many people have the wrong idea about those who cannot read or write. Intelligence has nothing to do with learning difficulties. I have heard the most profound poetry, seen astounding paintings, and many other talents that those with degrees would envy.

I realize we don't have all the answers, other wise we wouldn't be here today, however, I do believe collectively we can make a difference. And what I mean by that is, parents, educators, adults students, all schools and agencies coming together and become one voice of those children who are still not being heard. We owe our children that!

And how about adult learners, why isn't there a workshop for potential learners to attend, to listen to someone like myself who has made a recovery? Adults thinking of coming back to school need to be encouraged, to be given hope, to come to believe a new life is possible and that what they learn, their loved ones may also benefit from. Many of these people have traveled a lost and forsaken road therefore some of them entering school arrive with shattered lives having given up all hope.

Which also raises another question, why is there no emotional counseling for these students while attending school? We would all agree those having been in battle whether it be for a few months or a few years often are emotionally scarred and need some help in recovering. Yet many adult learners have been at war most of their lives.

Furthermore, is there a brochure out in the community with one phone number on that can be dialed receiving information as to what is available out there for them. People with learning difficulties won't be looking it up in a phone book. And what do I mean by communities? High schools, colleges, universities, all societies dealing with learning difficulties, manpower, social services, hospitals, Dr.'s offices, clinics, individual community centers, motor vehicle branches, banks, libraries, police stations and large corporations, and especially buses since most learners travel that way. This way we can also make a greater public awareness to the seriousness and size of illiteracy in this country.

Our greatest resource to a promising future lay in two areas, parents instilling upon their children a sense of love, security and morals, and the importance of education. Secondly teachers who I see as a book, holding a key to the past and a door to the future. Where dreams have been torn apart they can rebuild, turn tears into laughter, despair into hope, and sometimes to travel to many places one as only dreamed about. Teachers help break the chain to one of the most vicious cycles in our society today. However, I must stress the importance of parents reading to their children at a very early age.

A study was done on parents that read to their children as early as six months old. By age two their vocabulary was quite advanced and they faired far better in school than those who were not read to. I also believe that it creates a greater bonding between parent and child. I mention this because my parents never ever read to my siblings and I, and we all had difficulty in learning.

I have learned much over the past twelve years but one, which I will call bitter sweet, is this, children love as we have loved them, learn what we have taught them, and give back to society that which was given to them.

What made me turn my life around? When I saw three of my four children taking the same path I had. And what gave me a foundation to a greater way of life? Small! Classrooms at a place called the [READ Society](#) with two teachers. And I cannot stress enough the importance of small classrooms. Special ED at Camosun College which I'm sad to say is another program that no longer exists. I then went on to A.B.E. classes. And Project Literacy Victoria, supplying me with volunteer tutors. Continuing on the job training was a huge plus for me. However, all of these components had to come together in order for me to become the productive person I am today, giving me something I could build upon.

I cannot emphasize enough how greater impact a teacher can have on a person's life, particularly with adult learners. Having had the experience with many teachers over the past several years, I have watched them become doctors, nurses, lawyers, legal advisers, counselors, psychologist and all in one day. Not to mention the listening ear. When I first entered the READ's School it was in silence and a heavy heart, because I didn't believe they could help me. I'd been there done that, didn't work, but I was desperate and I had to try something. That was twelve years ago. Today they can't shut me up and they can't get rid of me either. So I have experienced first hand teachers performing miracles.

Teaching education to any human being, to my way of thinking is, the most underestimated profession in the world today. When I see teachers working so hard, learners working with incredible courage to for-fill a dream they thought was lost, and a child struggling in a class room; it reminds me of what a great man once wrote.

It is not the critic who counts, nor the people who point out how hard we stumble. Or where the doers of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the people who are in the arena; whose faces are marred by dust and sweat, who strive so valiantly, and may fail again, because there is no effort without error or shortcomings. But who actually strive to do the deed, who feel the great enthusiasm, who at best know in the end the triumph of high achievements, and who at worst, if they fail, at least fail while **DARING GREATLY**, so that their places shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

If history teaches us anything at all we know nothing is gained by the sword, but by ideals, you the teachers give us those prospective as to what those ideals may mean to a child and adult learner.

“Attitude is everything.”

Because once some teachers and volunteer tutors, listened to my silent heart, saw in me what I could not, lit a light in my darkness leaving me with a torch that has given me courage to share my struggles and glories with others today. And because of people like you I was able to serve a six year term on the Board of Directors for Project Literacy Victoria, I’m presently on the Board of Directors for the [READ Society](#) and Chairman of the Bursary Fund.

I’m on The Board of Directors for B.C. Cost Shared Program, I’m also on The Board of B.C. Learners, and recently voted to be the learners representative throughout British Columbia. I also served three years on the Learners’ Advisory Board in Victoria. I have been involved in numerous conferences, given many presentations, at high schools, colleges, and University of Victoria, and many other organizations. I have written poetry, short stories, a play and articles for newspapers and have written my autobiography.

All we learners ask for is what any human being wants, to live a life with dignity and pride, to look forward to the future and not fear it. To walk down the street and feel like a whole human being. To bring awareness and leave a legacy to our children of the freedom that education can bring. Thus giving them hope and confidence for an ever changing world of learning.

Because of better academic skills, my philosophy to life as changed, where once It was to take one dreaded day at a time, today I can truly say, my philosophy is, I am a spiritual being and I’m having one hell of a human experience.

Ellen Szita

## **Julie Lawson's Afternoon Keynote Address**

### **Taking the Plunge: Connections Beyond the Words**

When I started to prepare for this talk I checked out the internet for information on Literacy. I found 98,313 matches. I tried another search, this time for "Family Literacy." The matches narrowed down to 4,980. I said to myself, life is too short.

My mind started to wander. I wondered, why do they call it surfing the net? Surfing to me implies FAST! When I'm using the internet it feels more like treading water. I liked the water image, though. It fitted in nicely with the theme of this conference, Ripples on a Pond, so I played around with that idea for awhile.

Then I went back to thinking about literacy, the written word, and it occurred to me that WORDS might be an anagram for SWORD. I wrote it down, and sure enough, it is. And when you think about it, it's very appropriate. The written word, like a sword, has so much potential power. Imagine the ripples that were created when the Lady of the Lake raised her arm with the magical sword Excalibur! These ripples were created not just in the literal sense, but in the figurative sense as well. Like Excalibur, the written word stimulates the imagination. It often has a cutting edge. It can do great harm. It can inspire great deeds. A person needs the right skills to be able to use it effectively. And a guiding hand. And here's where we as parents, teachers, librarians, and authors play such an important role. We can demonstrate that words are important and powerful and magical. They're the maps that take us where we want to go. They provide information. They offer assistance and comfort. They draw us into a community that extends beyond the walls of the bedtime-story and out into the world. They open doors to adventures, to possibilities. Words kindle our imagination and enrich our lives.

#### **So how do we get that point across?**

The principal at an elementary school in Winnipeg had an idea for promoting literacy during I Love to Read month last February. When his 500 k-6 students read 5,869 books he literally "took the plunge." The students dressed up as pirates, and cheered wildly as he walked the plank set up in the school gym, and tumbled into the icy depths - or however deep the hot tub went. Last year the same school came up with the phrase "Pig out on Reading" and when the kids hit their reading mark, the principal kissed a pig. In my travels as an author I've met principals at other schools who milk cows, have cream pies thrown in their face, or dress up in a pink tutu for crossing guard duty, all to promote literacy. But you know, I've never heard of principals agreeing to kiss a pig or walk the plank if students turned on the computers and stayed on-line for a target number of hours. And I have to wonder, why do we have to go to such lengths to get kids to read? Here's a concept - reading can be fun for its own sake. Identifying with characters that you come to know and care about, getting involved in an adventurous plot, laughing until your sides ache, being swept away into the world of the imagination where you lose all track of time and all sense of place - All this - and much, much more can be found in a book! Reading can be its own reward!

Of course, that's ultimately our goal. That's why we have gimmicks and special programs - to motivate kids to read, hoping that they'll discover for themselves that reading can offer more than the dubious reward of seeing a man with banana cream pie all over his face.

When you toss a pebble in a pond, you can see the ripples. They expand outwards in ever-widening circles. Sometimes the wind might catch those ripples and take them out of the pond and into a stream. Then they might follow the current to a river and from there empty into the sea. Now they're no longer ripples, but waves - and a force to be reckoned with.

When you read a story to a child, it's like tossing a pebble into a pond. The difference is, you can't always see the ripples. But let's take one particular child, say a grade 5 boy and see what might happen.

His parent reads him a bedtime story. He loves it. The next AM he takes the book to school and reads it to his grade one buddy. The circle grows a little wider. At supper that night the 6-yr-old tells his mother the story. He even describes the illustrations. Mom sees that he really enjoyed the book, so she takes him to the library and with the help of a very knowledgeable librarian, they find the book - and others by the same author. The boy takes the whole lot to school to share with his older buddy. The grade five teacher listens in, and the circle grows wider. This teacher really likes one of the stories, and even though it's a picture book, she recognizes a theme that could fit in very nicely with her social studies curriculum. Plus the illustrations are fabulous - hmm maybe the starting point for an art project. Anyway, she reads the book to her whole grade 5 class during story time. 30 kids love it. These 30 kids go home and tell their parents about the book. OK, not every single one of them, but the few kids that don't, they recognize the book the next time they're in a library, or walking past a book store in a mall and they mention it. "Hey, I read that book," they say, even though it was the teacher who did the actual reading. But they take ownership of the book because they shared the experience of hearing it. And because it was a good experience, the circle grows still wider.

There's no question that read-aloud story-times are the single most important way to promote literacy. It's the bedtime story that's often a child's first introduction to the printed word. It's also an experience of closeness between child and parent, and later, amongst teacher and classmates...

Research supports the practice of reading aloud as a powerful way to improve student's reading, writing, speaking and listening. It introduces kids to a rich language that expands their vocabulary and heightens their awareness of sensory detail and imagery. It introduces them to exciting new worlds to imagine and explore. Listening to stories stimulates a child's imagination and stretches their attention span. The power of literature enables kids to vicariously experience racism, justice, love, compassion, loss and friendship, and it provides the spark for discussions on the issues that affect them in their daily lives. Most importantly, reading to kids improves their attitudes about reading. It provides a positive role model and teaches them to want to read. And kids who want to read become life-long readers...

The wonderful thing about reading aloud is that every child brings his own personal experience, memories and background to a story. In a classroom situation, there may be 30 completely different responses. But since they're all listening to the same story, a bond is created that envelopes everyone, including the teacher. I'm hearing a lot about novel studies where the teacher reads the novel as a read aloud. Everyone participates in the discussions, including the teacher. And afterwards, each student is assigned a specific chapter. They become an expert on that one chapter, so the novel study doesn't become overwhelming...

So you read aloud at home and in the classroom. You promote literacy in every way you can. What is it that makes the difference, that really turns the tide, that makes a child a reader. I think it's what I call "the magic book" - the right book at the right time, the book that draws a child so far out of themselves and into the story that they forget that maybe they can't even read very well. They're lost! And what a great pleasure it is to be lost in a book...

That "magic book" will be whatever book happens to speak to a child in some way. It's the book that hits home. Maybe they're swept away by the language. Or the humour. Or a gripping plot. Maybe they're taken to a place that's exciting and magical - a place that stirs the imagination. Whatever the story is about, whether it's fantasy, mystery, adventure, historical fiction - I think it must be an emotionally satisfying experience. When they can identify with a character and a situation and say, Yes. I know what that's like. I understand...

When we read to children we often have no idea of the lasting impression we're making. I started thinking about this one night when I couldn't get to sleep. Finally I got up and took a book off the shelf. It happened to be "A Child's Garden of Verses", by Robert Louis Stevenson. For some reason I opened the book to the dedication page, which says, "To my nurse, Alison Cunningham." The dedication is in the form of a poem, and my favorite line is, "For all the story-books you read." Just think what literary treasures we might have missed out on, if Robert Louis Stevenson hadn't had an Alison Cunningham in his life. For all the story-books you read. When I was teaching I never had a class burst into spontaneous applause after a social studies lesson or gym class or field trip. But it often happened when I reached the end of a book. Not because the story was finished, but because they loved it.

Of course, every child you read to isn't going to grow up to be a Robert Louis Stevenson. Or even an author. We're delighted if he grows up to be a reader. Books are the starting points. They release thoughts and ideas. If you read a lot to kids, let's face it, they might not even grow up to be readers. But they might grow up with an imagination. They might grow up able to reflect and consider various points of view. They might grow up to believe in their own voices.

The written word draws us into a community that extends beyond the walls of the bedtime-story and out into the world. In closing, I'd like to say, "Go forth, and polish your swords - slash - words" but I won't. Instead I'll quote from a poster I saw in a staffroom during a recent school visit. It said, "One hundred years from now, it won't

matter how much money I made or what kind of car I drove. But the world might be a better place because I made a difference in the life of a child.” Literacy can make that difference. So drop the pebble in the pond. And let the ripples make waves.

Julie Lawson

## 6 Reports on Presentations

### The Need for Expository Text in the Literacy Program

*Dr. Terry D. Johnson is a Professor of Education in the Faculty of Education at UVIC. He is the author of Literacy through Literature and Bringing it all Together. Dr. Johnson has had speaking engagements in Canada, U.S.A., Nigeria, U.K., Venezuela, China and Australia.*

The prime job of B.C. school system is the development of the intellect of the children. Socialization is not the sole purpose. Teachers are paid for enhancing the intellectual development of students.

Intellectualism involves rationality, logic and abstract thought through an expansion of world knowledge beyond the immediate firsthand experience of the learner.

1990 Harvard study. "Reading Crisis: Why Poor Children fall Behind" (Jeanne S. Choll, Vicki A Jacobs, Lake E. Baldwin)

"Poor" in United States refers to children from Black and Hispanic communities. "Poor" in Canada refers to ESL or First Nation Students.

- Spread between students in grades 2-3 is not big (scores between above and below average are small). Scores start to slump in grade 4. However, those kids who were below average started an earlier, more intense slump. Those who were above average began to slip later with milder effects.
- Vocabulary scores slipped first (suggest lack of conceptual growth more so than actual vocabulary slipping). Students had difficulty defining abstract, academic, literary and uncommon words. Word recognition, spelling, oral reading and comprehension slip after.

### What accounts for this "Grade 4 Slump"?

Grade 1 students are taught to learn to read. In grade 4, students are taught to read to learn.

Readers of expository materials at these early stages of development appear to struggle from an inability to use appropriate strategies and skills in a spontaneous manner.

While children show an ability to read narrative material (recounting information), they are unable to completely read and understand their content area.

Embedded in Writers Workshop is the idea of having students write any way they want. Students will write in the easiest form they know - recount an experience. Students are taught how to recount orally. Kindergarten students recount and so do Grade 6 students. The latter recounts are just longer!

Must teach how to do other writing forms. We are teaching students to write down what we orally talk about, most of which has no plot or climax.

1977 studies - children 5 or 6 years of age can employ strategies when taught to do so.

Terry Johnson taught kindergarten students the following strategy:

Bits and Pieces: Show me what you know about a story (or expository).

Begin by showing students an example based on a familiar story (model).

Read students an unfamiliar story and help them create bits and pieces.

- a. Read expository text
- b. Draw meaningful content
- c. name, i.e., Penguin
- d. label, i.e., tail
- e. extend labeling, i.e., tail is for steering
- f. comment, i.e., This is Adelle Penguin. He lives in the rookery in Antarctica. Penguins build nests of stone.

Developmental opportunity - responses can be longer, more elaborate, interrelated.

Have the children reproduce some bits and pieces of the penguin or subject that interest them. Share and Display.

\*\* To develop students own thinking and sentences and reduce copying - put books on chalkboard. Students choose book to read and replace with notebook (The Separation Solution)

### **Example of an Expository Lesson**

Spider lesson:

- a. Observe spider - mystery package?
- b. Tell partner something you know about spiders, i.e., I saw a spider make a web. (model expository reading style - need to drop narrative reading style or you may find kids talking about the spider that ran across their shoe the other day!).
- c. Shared Reading - spider text - read bits of text out. Draw attention to sources of knowledge: pictures, world knowledge (what you know about spiders and what kids know about spiders), aids, i.e., globe. Use all sources of knowledge to present text.
- d. Student share spider texts with partner. What can you find out about spiders?
- e. Create stations - make something that shows me what you know about spiders (caption and label optional).
  - play-doh
  - cut and paste
  - painting
  - construction
  - face painting
- f. Send note to parents - make something at home that shows what you know about spiders. Write what you can on note (may just be the letter "S" for some children).

The goal of reading expository texts is to broaden a child's world.

Expand the conceptual world.

## **Margaret Donaldson**

In primary grades, children seem eager, lively and spontaneous. They are encouraged to explore, discover and create. In Intermediate years, seem to be unfulfilled. The promise of the early years remains bitter and students seem defeated and lack skills.

## **Kierran Egan- SFU professor wrote Primary Understanding**

“We may reinterpret the truism that when teaching and designing curricula, we must move gradually from the known to the unknown” p. 27. “If we ... encourage children to explore the ordinary and the everyday we are discouraging such conceptual elaboration” p. 27. “Curricula in North America tends towards tyrannizing children’s imaginations with the local and provincial because children cannot engage or understand context that is remote from their experience... children can most readily conceptualize the content of their daily experience” p. 30.

Show and tell - children are usually bored! Mundane pieces of material are brought in. How can show and tell be engaging and mind engaging? Don’t get confused with the rhetoric of show and tell.

Journal writing - if you allow kids to have free choice in journal writing, you will get recounts. Teachers need to push those conceptual boundaries by framing or structuring topics (i.e., tell me something about spiders that we have looked at in class).

Journal writing and Show and Tell and other such principles lead to a curriculum that hinders rather than helps children to engage in reality during the primary and intermediate school years.

Egan - we tend to trivialize the curriculum precisely when it should be intellectually at its richest. “ Meaningful content needs to be that which is immediate to children’s everyday experience” p. 45.

Piaget - children are egocentric and only see things and learn from their own point of view. Studies show that this is not true. Children can understand and learn from different perspectives. The curriculum is based on material that is familiar to students (ie. Primary Grades - Me, Family, Community). This does not broaden knowledge bases or expand the child’s conceptual world.

Pattern texts - shared reading -very little conceptual growth. Narrative is a bit more. Expository expands conceptual development.

## **Three ways to Conceptualize Language**

### **1. B.I.C.S. = Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills**

- casual chat, gossip
- 3000 words
- all but most deprived children bring BICS from home

### **2. L. L. A. = Literary Language Ability - language in story books or poetry**

### **3. C.A.L. P. = Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency - lexemes (a little piece of meaning).**

- English language has over one million lexemes - ie. U.N., I.B.M.

- Divided into different areas, teacher talk, politic talk ...

At the moment - only providing students with B.I.C.S. and L.L.A.

\*\* The use of informal styles of language (B.I.C.S.) to re-express that which is already familiar is not a very good vehicle for the expansion of world knowledge or developing an increasing capacity for abstract thought.

UVIC education student (member of VTS)

### **First Nation's Literacy: evaluating First Nation's literature, curricula and resources using a criterion of authenticity**

Teresa Wilson's session, "First Nation's Literacy: Evaluating First Nation's literature, curricula and resources using a criterion of authenticity," was very informative and interesting. Participants became familiar with the D. Cameron and L. Davies checklist for identifying bias and stereotyping in First Nations and non-First Nation's literature. It is thorough, easy to apply, and would be a useful device for anyone to have at their disposal when assessing and choosing appropriate literature. Participants were also given a list of highly recommended children's books, recommended authors, and informative books on multicultural literature.

Judith Forman

### **ADHD: Little things matter**

Terry Rennie's presentation, *Little Things Matter*, is designed to give parents and teachers a better understanding of where children with ADHD are coming from. He outlines the difficulties they face and gives the audience a small glimpse into an ADHD child's world. Teachers and parents learn to gain a greater sensitivity towards the child and to set realistic expectations for their child. He stresses the importance of setting goals and establishing set routines. Coming out of the seminar, teachers will feel refreshed and ready to try new approaches with the children they are working with.

UVIC education student (member of VTS)

### **Lateral Literacy: Materials and strategies for the reluctant reader**

Dr. Mary Dayton-Sakari spoke engagingly about *Lateral Literacy: Materials and strategies for the reluctant reader*. Dr. Dayton-Sakari addressed the emotional part of reading and how "hands-on" books can help reluctant readers begin to see the enjoyment of reading. She brought many fascinating (from the dreadful to the sublime) examples of books that could entice a student to touch the books- the first step in getting students to read. We reviewed some characteristics of reluctant readers and looked at some ways (or user-friendly entry points) that could help them change their specific emotional response to reading. Something that Dr. Dayton-Sakari didn't discuss, but modeled beautifully, was how the enthusiasm of the teacher can help the student. Sometimes just listening to the students talking about reading can improve their outlook. It was an interesting, enlightening workshop and one I would recommend.

Janie Harrison

### **Exploring Literature through Drama: An experiential workshop demonstrating the use of drama as a learning medium**

At this workshop, Carole Miller provided opportunities to explore drama and its use as a tool to invite children into literature. Since drama incorporates all learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), it can be used to deepen children's understanding of story, as students can become more aware of themselves in relation to the story characters. Inviting children to "walk in another's shoes" broadens students' awareness of their own views and perspectives. Drama also helps children to make emotional connections with the story as there are few rules, everyone can participate, and students are in control of their experiences. A wonderful learning opportunity can then take place.

During this workshop, Carole Miller demonstrated the types of lead-up drama activities before introducing the literature, and all who were attending the workshop were expected to "play" during these exercises. The Pumpkin Blanket by Deborah Turney Zagwyn was read and at critical points in the story the group was asked to delve more deeply into the character's psyche through role play and guided movement. A number of extension activities were suggested at the end of the workshop and each participant also received the drama unit created by Carole Miller.

Robyn Mor

### **The Volunteer Teaching Squad and Literacy**

Frances Thorsen and Jocelyn Dimm began their presentation by having all present share their own experiences in volunteering and consider the benefits to ourselves as well as to those we were helping. They discussed the many ways in which the students who make up the VTS are willing to help and encouraged us to make use of these enthusiastic students in our classrooms and literacy organizations. Members of the VTS have had Criminal Record Checks and have been cleared by the unions to volunteer. Anyone wishing to take advantage of this service can phone Frances at 721-6346 or email her at [fgt@uvic.ca](mailto:fgt@uvic.ca).

Jan Beckett

### **3 Reports from Learners**

#### **Last Friday**

Last Friday we were invited to participate in a conference. I've been to others, but I particularly liked this one for all the choices we got. That makes it more interesting.

Everybody has different interests and being able to choose is good. I had chosen "Connecting school and home", I thought it was something different than what it was but I learned some things. I got some material I will be able to use in the future, such as Grandparents Helping and free reading programs.

My second choice was "The Impact of Television on Children." The way he conducted the seminar was very nice. We all participated and were kept interested. The information and studies done on the matter are amazing. The best news was that you can let your kids watch TV if you are with them. Interacting and talking with them, the parents can shift the meaning of the program they are watching.

The program closure was very good. A Canadian writer shared with us her experiences and her work. She showed us how important it is to communicate your feelings and to awake others too.

The first speaker was my inspiration, a fifty-six year old woman who graduated from High School when she was in her forties and after that she hasn't stopped helping others. Very inspiring, it makes me feel like I can teach and inspire others.

Maria Flores

The lecture on the effects of T.V. I found the most informative. It just reinforced what I already have come up against as a dad who is trying to raise my children as Christians. The media will come against every inch of my children's faith, they will be bombarded with the view that life is meaningless, there is no purpose, no future hope, react any way you see fit, or use any means available. I am amazed that the producers of today's media don't see a problem with our children viewing 24,000 murders this year on T.V. or that there is no consequence for 84% of the violence they view. Why does my six year old have to be surrounded with music and T.V. that promotes sex, abortion, drugs and a live for today cavalier attitude? Why are my son's action heroes and videos rich in violence and occult? Why are characters we would never let have personal influence on our kids in our living-rooms each day via T.V.?

I am not trying to come across as some righteous prude, my children have seen me lose it and know I have been arrested in my past. Depression, drugs, alcohol, and violence are a part of my life that will always haunt and wrestle with me. I don't want our children, who have so much, to lose all their potential to violence, abuse and alcohol. I learned we all have a long way to go, and will often fall short as parents and individuals, but the minds of our children are not something we should let our T.V. steal.

### **Literacy Connections**

The seminar was very pleasing with all the information that was handed out to us. The first session I went to was with Maria and Francis. The course was called “Connecting School and Home.” It seemed very long and I didn’t really get to record any information down because of all of the papers that were being passed around.

When it was time for lunch I didn’t get down the stairs very quickly. I took my own sweet time. I went to the bathroom and washed my hands. When I arrived to eat though I saw there were only wraps and bagels left. The wraps had different meats in them. The bagels had tuna in them. There was no salad left though, which I would’ve really liked, but I didn’t get there on time. Since I am becoming a pesco vegetarian the only thing left was the tuna bagel. I also had a cookie.

The second seminar that I attended was called ADHD and Literacy: “The Little Things Matter” by Terry Rennie. I find that Terry did a good presentation. He knew how to speak of this topic, because of his own experience with his son. Yes! His son does have this disease. When he presented this matter to us I started looking at myself to see if I had the problem. When I really look at it now though I would have to say no. The only thing that I have is a couple of bad habits. I need to read more and do homework. This has been a hard task for me. One of the bad habits is watching t.v. so much. I would like to learn more on this subject though, because you never know if your children will have it or not. To me it would be important to learn communication with the people who have ADHD. It’s one of the little things that would help.

I also saw some writers who make a change in the world for children and literacy. This was great to see such superb people that know how to reach out to our hearts. I love to see people making a difference to others by showing us who we really can be. This was a great time at a function where we could all learn. It was not boring if you wanted to learn more on these certain subjects. If you had kids also it would’ve helped you to be more aware of how to bring your kids into this highly technological world. Life’s grand if you can read.

Corey Comeau